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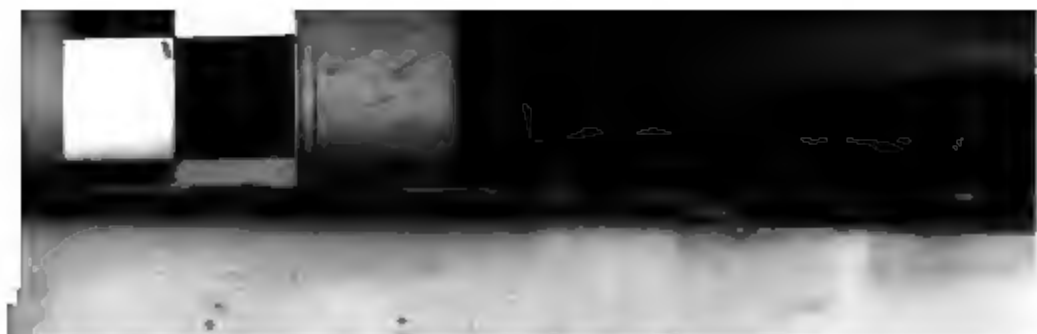
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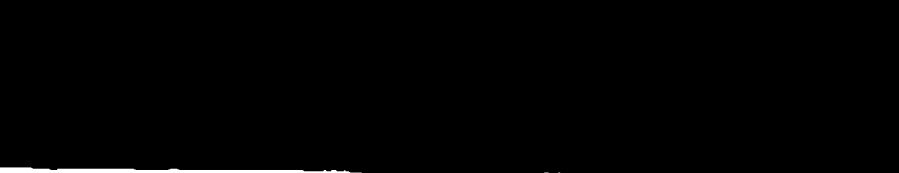


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THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM.

Ἐκαστον τῶν εἰρημένων μετὰ ἀκριβείας διερευνησώμεθα ἵνα ἴδωμεν τῆς γνώμης τοῦ πατριάρχου τὸ φιλόθεον. . . . Σκόπει πῶς ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐκ προοιμιῶν ἐγυμνάζετον ὁ δίκαιος τὰ μὴ φαινόμενα τῶν φαινομένων προτιμᾶν, καὶ τὰ μελλόντα τῶν ἐν χερσὶν ὄντων.—Chrysost. Homil. XXXI. in Cap. 12. Genes.

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD
ILLUSTRATED
IN THE
LIFE OF ABRAHAM:

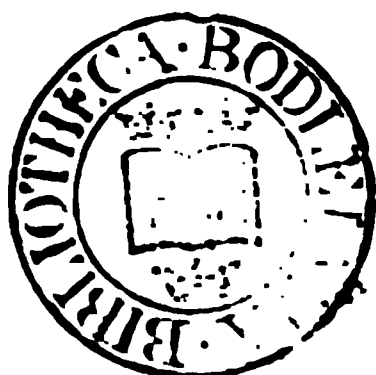
A SERIES OF DISCOURSES
PREACHED IN ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, EVERTON;

BY
THE REV. R. P. BUDDICOM, M.A. F.A.S.
MINISTER OF THAT CHURCH, AND LATE FELLOW
OF QUEEN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

—
VOL. I.
—

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384-



I. AND G. SEELEY, WESTON GREEN, THAMES DITTON, SURREY.

TO
THE CONGREGATION
OF
ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, EVERTON.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

A LARGE proportion of the years usually allotted to the life of man have gone by, since I introduced some portions of ministerial labour to public notice, under the same sanction, which I now seek for the following pages. Since that time, many of those, unto whom it was my privilege to preach, in whatever weakness and inability, the unsearchable riches of Christ, have passed into the invisible world; but their kindness and affection are fresh in the memory of my heart. To those who sur-

been extended to me. With the
help of God, I continue unto
me therefore to request your
dedication of these volumes to
though feeble testimony of
cordial attachment with which

**Your affectionate Pastor &
Truth of Jesus, and in
of His Chu**

R. P.

PREFACE.

THE *Precepts* and *Promises* of Scripture, glowing throughout its pages with brightness derived from the Sun of Righteousness, who is the Author and End of both, receive additional lustre from the *Examples* of Holy Writ. Those examples exhibit, as it were, a substance which renders all the doctrinal parts of the word of God more real and apprehensible by the mind. The historical portions of the Bible, therefore, which shew forth, not only the vicissitudes of nations, but condescend to the dealing of God with individuals, are peculiarly instructive. They embody those revelations of his will, which the Most High has made to man, instead of leaving them to be regarded as abstract de-

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able, however some of the features may be modified in the individuals who compose the great family of man. The genus is one, although the many species into which it is divided may have their characteristic distinctions. Whether we regard the highest or the lowest extreme of intellectual being—those, over whom philosophy, learning, and science have shed their most powerful lights, or those who are enchained in the darkest and most debasing fetters of ignorance, the whole offspring of fallen Adam is naturally under the influence and motive power of that carnal mind which is enmity against God. While therefore, the physical character of man is so exceedingly diversified, and his mental circumstances those of such continual change, the same spiritual truths and impulses (which in the revelation of God bore upon his heart and character, when salvation was first preached, to correct and remove the guilt, impotence, and misery, wherein the original lapse from righteousness had placed him, and to restore him to the divine image, with all its gracious and glorious privileges) still exist, and must be equally applicable to his state, until the end of the world.

One class of motives, rules, and aims, has in-

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umphs achieved, as the great Representative of true religion among the elder saints of God. The story of his life is so deeply instructive, and the witness of the Holy Ghost is so unequivocally given to him, that we may well understand why St. Paul (Heb. xi.) should only mention two especial instances of faith in the old world—Abel and Enoch—and that of Noah in the world restored, in order that he may hasten to dwell with admiration and delight upon the devoted confidence of the FRIEND OF GOD. Abraham stands almost at the head of that great cloud of witnesses, by whom the Christian is compassed about: and whose presence is noted, as one of the reasons why he should “lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset him, and run with patience the race that is set before him, looking unto Jesus.”

The lives of pious ancestors are the property of their children; not as heir-looms, in which they may glory, while themselves have in all good things greatly degenerated from the models bequeathed them: but as examples to stimulate and provoke them to a holy jealousy. The lives of God's saints, enshrined in his word, are in like manner the property of the church;

not as mere objects of speculative wonder and respect; but of humble yet zealous imitation. Such examples are given, in order that the members of Christ's Holy Catholic Church may become "followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises." In this important view—the view wherein every similar instance should be regarded, the example of Abraham is exceedingly precious. It may therefore, well justify a minister of religion, in bringing it with much copiousness before his hearers, and in endeavouring to impress it upon their hearts, precept upon precept, and line upon line.

Another reason may also be given for that kind of consecutive preaching, of which an instance is given in the following pages. There is a *mannerism* in preaching, as well as in painting, which if left uncorrected, (and it is not easy to apply the remedy,) tends greatly to contract the horizon of spiritual truth in the mind of a clergyman, and hinders him from making full proof of his ministry, by declaring "the whole counsel of God." He has some favourite truths and topics which recur almost insensibly to his mind; at first by the force of inclination, and afterwards by the power of

habit; until at length they become invested with an interest which absorbs all other; thus hindering him from treading the circle of an enlarged and enlightened theology. He has some cherished system of divinity, which he deems it necessary, on all occasions, to advance and enforce. He has a class of texts which he regards as supremely important: and the book of Revelation is graduated in his mind, like certain Bibles published not very remotely, wherein the chapters were numbered, according to a scale of relative importance, to which they were applied. Every clergyman must have felt this temptation to narrow the ground of his pulpit ministrations; to rest with delight by the wells, and under the palm trees of his own Elim, and to regard all other Scripture as comparatively barren. They are happy who have least powerfully felt this temptation; or rather who have most resolutely and fervently, and therefore most successfully, prayed and struggled against it.

Perhaps one of the most practicable modes of avoiding or overcoming it, is to abstain occasionally from the consideration of detached passages of Scripture, in unconnected sermons; by studying and expounding a consecutive and

system. A consideration of the conduct of those whose memoirs are in the Bible, can hardly exert influence, of being, in some degree, to the minister's own mind, as leading him to open upon his hearers a stream of divine truth, that he may draw from its pure and in-
exhaustible fountain.

Under this conviction I was induced to arrange the plan of a course upon the life and character of Christ. A variety of circumstances prevented executing this design for a considerable time. While the work was actually in progress, I was compelled by ill health to be absent from England. On my return

1831

fore encouraged, in dependence upon Him, to bring this series of Discourses before the public. It may well be asked, why the determination was taken to follow out the pulpit by the press, when this department of the fruitful field of Scriptural Biography has been so well occupied by the Rev. Henry Hunter, and the Rev. Thomas Robinson; and more recently by the Rev. Henry Blunt, in his "Twelve Lectures on the History of Abraham?" I answer, that with all their excellencies, especially those of the two latter, they yet seemed to have left a few ears "of the corn of heaven," after their own rich harvest, even for so poor a gleaner as myself, which might be bound up in a little sheaf, as another sincere, however unworthy offering to the Church of God. I may add, that my own plan had been formed before the publication of Mr. Blunt's very interesting volume, and indeed before I was at all aware of his intention.

It was difficult, perhaps impracticable, at least without greater tact and resources than I could bring to the attempt, to avoid considerable repetition of sentiment, and even of language in many parts of these volumes. The mode of treating the subject appears to me,

any advantage which a more
variety might have afforded
to advance these great ends of
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believing expediency so awakes
of divine authority, and
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faith, purifying the heart, w
and overcoming the world, is,

...

PREFACE.

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them to possess it more largely, and exercise it more vigorously, I do most earnestly beg an interest in that reader's prayers, that I may much more effectually than heretofore, realize what I have endeavoured to describe, through the remainder of my pilgrimage.

R. P. B.

Everton, 1839.

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THE HEIRS OF PROMISE.

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IF YE BE CHRIST'S, THEN ARE YE ABRAHAM'S SEED, AND HEIRS
ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE.

IN that universal charter of grace, wherewith God has enriched his Church, the ministers of the everlasting Gospel are not only included, but particularized. Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and their successors, the ambassadors for Christ, with their intellectual and spiritual attainments, their trials, experiences, consolations, and labours of love, are substantial parts of this all-comprehending inheritance. Even such a portion has the Christian in every Saint, of whom the Scriptures have borne record, whether under the Old or New Testament. Assuredly those judgments which befel the offending Israelites in the wilderness, "*happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world*

are come."¹ It is equally certain, that those elders, who through faith obtained a good report, had this high testimony of the Spirit, not merely for their own peace and joy in believing, but also, that their examples might serve as guides and landmarks to the Church, through all its history. They form an important part of that great cloud of witnesses who compass about the faithful soldiers and servants of Jesus Christ, in their gracious warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Being dead, they yet speak. They bear testimony to the unsearchable riches of mercy in the covenant of redemption; to the unchangeable faithfulness of its surety, Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" and to the Almighty power of God the Holy Ghost, whereby they were "kept, through faith unto salvation." It is a Christian's duty, when reading the histories of these saints, to follow them by faith within the veil; and to see the happiness of their state, while awaiting the resurrection of the just, at the second coming of their Lord. They were men who "through faith and patience have inherited the promises." And their testimony is given to the intent that, "*laying aside every*

¹ 1 Cor. x. 11.

weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, we should run with patience the race that is set before us, (if indeed we have entered upon the spiritual course,) looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith: who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame; and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." ¹

Among these elder saints, of whom the world was not worthy, the Patriarch Abraham occupies a distinguished place. The Holy Scriptures have invested him with titles and relations the most illustrious and important. They have described him as *the father of the faithful,—the friend of God,—the covenant representative of that Incarnate Word who is the Federal Head of the whole household of God,—the chosen parent, in whose seed all the families of the earth should be blessed*. Were he however to be exhibited only under these aspects, he would be invested with so large a measure, not only of superiority, but of abstraction, as to appear removed beyond the sphere of ordinary sympathies. He would therefore become an object of admiration, rather than a mean of practical usefulness to the church, as one of the loftiest examples of faith

¹ Heb. xii. 1, 2.

and holiness. But mark the graciousness and consideration of divine wisdom in the revelation of mercy to man! In the "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh," we have not only "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" but a Saviour invested with all the needful sympathies of our nature. He can therefore be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, for that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted. That very Redeemer, who in his divine nature is one with the Father over all, God blessed for evermore, wept, in the depth of human feelings, over the grave of a friend; and commended his mother to the disciple whom He loved, in the last agony of his passion. We have the preciousness of his atonement, for the pardon of sin; of his obedience, as the perfect righteousness of every believer; of his Spirit, as the Sanctifier and Comforter of the Church; and the blessed example of his most holy life, to direct the goings of its members heavenward. Even so in the case of Abraham. He is not only a man highly dignified of God, and mystically related to the heirs of salvation, but he has a peculiar claim upon the regard of all Christians, as perhaps the chief of those eminent saints who trod the pilgrimage of grace in the

twilight of its day, “ *before the Sun of Righteousness arose upon the world with healing in his wings.*”¹ His eventful life is a beautiful realization of the principle of faith, whereby alone man can live to God, and do his will. He is an instance, the most animating, of its power, its walk, its trials, and its victories. We behold in him divine history teaching by a noble example; and the precept of the Holy Ghost practically illustrated by the conduct of one in whom He truly dwelled.

It is my purpose, therefore, in dependance on the divine blessing, to undertake a series of discourses upon the life and character of this devoted servant of God. I commence his portraiture in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. Join with me in supplication, that my feebleness may be strengthened, my ignorance enlightened, my confined and unworthy views of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory enlarged. Plead for me at the throne of grace, that the storehouse may be made by the Holy Ghost more capacious to hold the bread of life, and the steward more faithful to distribute it among you !

The text has been selected, as furnishing, out of the argument of which it forms a part,

¹ Mal. iv. 2.

the most undeniable proof, that every one who professes the gospel of a crucified Saviour in sincerity and truth, has an immediate and personal interest in the history of this illustrious believer; and that too, an interest the most momentous, because it is spiritual and gracious. "*If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*" Holy Spirit of God, the unerring Teacher of all who seek Thee, open our eyes that we may understand, and our hearts, that we may receive thy word!

The subject obviously divides itself into two particulars,

I. THE SUPPOSITION MADE. *If ye be Christ's.*

II. THE CONCLUSION DRAWN. *Then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

We proceed then to examine briefly, THE APOSTLE'S SUPPOSITION. It is a view equally chilling, unsatisfactory, and unscriptural, to regard St. Paul's assumption as merely referring to a moral imitation of our Lord's temper of mind, holiness, and purity,—a kind of dim and distant connexion between Himself and his disciples, made visible only by the slight resemblance which may exist between persons

of somewhat similar habits and pursuits. If language can speak clearly at all, it certainly speaks here of propriety,—of a close and endearing interest possessed by the Redeemer in those whom St. Paul addresses. Similar forms of expression, and obviously with similar meaning abound in his Epistles. “*Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord’s.*”¹ “*All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.*”²

Now mark the whole course of this inexpressibly blessed assurance. Every thing, whether in nature or in grace, is the absolute and unquestionable property of those who are “*washed, sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*”³ And what constitutes the reason of the grant, and the validity of the rich endowment? The interest which Christ hath in them, and the interest which God hath in Christ. Is this an interest of imitation, or of right and possession? The chain is perfect in all its links: and God be praised, that it cannot be

¹ Romans xiv. 8.² 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.³ 1 Cor. vi. 11.

broken by any of those cold and comfortless interpretations, whose authors seem to enjoy a perverse satisfaction in lowering and chilling the spiritual tone of religion among us. The scriptural assurance of identity between the Bridegroom and the bride, the Head and the members, the Vine and the branches, is a rock of immovable refuge to a Christian's hope : *"I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one : and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me."*¹

If the infallible guidance of Scripture be taken to direct us, we shall find no difficulty in determining to whom this high distinction belongs. We may easily discover who are thus numbered among the saints of God for glory everlasting. They have been given by the Father to his Son, in the mediatorial character which He assumed for the world's salvation ; that He might restore them from their lapsed and lost condition in sin and condemnation ;—that He might once again impress upon them the image of God, and readmit them to the family of heaven ;—that He might see in them of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. *"Thine they were, and Thou gavest them unto Me."*² He received them at the

¹ John xvii. 23.

² Ibid xvii. 6.

Father's hand, in that eternal engagement of his love, whereby He undertook to raise up in them a temple to Himself, from the dust and ruin of the fall ; and to make them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He undertook their otherwise hopeless cause, as a community of property and possession, wherein both his Father and Himself might have a perpetual interest of complacency and delight. He engaged to remove the guilt they would incur, by its assumption upon Himself, in virtue of his one oblation of Himself once offered, as the one full and perfect satisfaction for the sins of the whole world ; to maintain their cause by an unceasing and prevailing advocacy on their behalf in the court of heaven ; to sanctify them, body, soul, and spirit, by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost ; to leave no work for them imperfect and undone. He pledged Himself to persevere in these unfathomably mysterious offices of love, until God in Him, having accomplished the number of his elect, and made ready his kingdom, He should say as its everlasting Administrator, "*Those whom thou gavest me have I kept. All mine are thine, and thine are mine ; and I am glorified in them.*"¹ He covenanted,

¹ John xvii. 10, 11.

not only to bring in an everlasting righteousness, which should be unto all, and upon all them that believe; but to dwell in their hearts by his Holy Spirit; and by the almighty energy of his grace, there to unlock the springs of that holiness, whereby they might adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things, and without which no man shall see the Lord. ‘Participation,’ saith the judicious Hooker, ‘is that mutual inward hold which Christ hath of us, and we of Him, in such sort that each possesseth other by way of interest, property, and inherent copulation. We are in God through Christ eternally, according to that intent and purpose whereby we are chosen to be made his in this present world, before the world itself was made. We are in God, through the knowledge which is had of us, and the love which is borne towards us from everlasting. But—our being in Christ by eternal foreknowledge, saveth us not without our actual and real adoption into the fellowship of his saints into this present world. We are therefore adopted sons of God to eternal life by participation of the only begotten Son of God, whose life is the wellspring and cause of ours. It is too cold an interpretation whereby some men expound our being in Christ to import nothing else but only that the self-same nature

which maketh us to be men is in Him, and maketh Him man, as we are. For what man in the world is there, that hath not so far forth communion with Jesus Christ? The church is in Christ, as Eve was in Adam. Yea, by grace we are every one of us in Christ, and in his church, as by nature we were in those our first parents.¹

Contemplate especially *The Price* paid by the Son of God when He bore the overwhelming load of human transgression in his own body on the tree; when it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and to make his soul an offering for sin. And this view being taken, we may ask whether in those who are Christ's He may not challenge a right of purchase for an interest mutual and interchangeable between them and Himself; immeasurably more close and endearing than could be imagined on the ground of discipleship alone, could that connection be separated from the other relations in which every believer must stand to his Lord? "*Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.*"² "*Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price.*"³

¹ Hooker, *Ecc. Pol.* v. 56.

² 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

³ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

Are we Christ's? *Then we have given ourselves to Him in a full and voluntary surrender.* Then it is the joy and gladness of our enlightened will, corrected judgment, and sanctified affections, to say, each in his individual experience, "*I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine.*"¹ Then He is welcomed to the heart in all his offices of salvation, and all the glory of his double nature. Then, although the votaries of an unbelieving world, the sceptics who idolize a vain and infidel philosophy, bearing the same resemblance to the Gospel of Jesus, as the rudest image bears to the living, thinking, feeling man, see no beauty in Him why they should desire Him, his people are made willing to receive Him in the day of his power over their hearts. They own Him as their Lord, and adore Him as their God. His new name will be written in their minds. He will be the living centre of all attractiveness to their desires. It will be their joy and best delight to have fellowship with Him ; here in his word, his way, his promises, his comforts, nay in his reproaches and persecutions ; as well as hereafter, in the kingdom of his glory. His Gospel hath an effectual might to transform them into his image,

¹ Song of Sol. vi. 3.

and make them **anxious** to perfect holiness in the fear of God. And if the Gibeonites, when delivered from the sword, were willing to become hewers of wood, and drawers of water to the congregation, so are they whom the Saviour hath rescued from the utter 'death of sin, and reconciled in will to God, making peace between them, not only contented, but joyful to glorify God in the calls of that service which is perfect freedom. "*The love of Christ constraineth them ; because they thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that He died for all, that they who live, should not live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again.*"¹ The devils are his vassals ; the wicked of this world are his prisoners. The faithful dependents upon his person and merit are his subjects and followers, in all the unrivalled preference of their hearts' affection. They are his jewels, his brethren, his sons, they are his by every title of endearment that can be named or imagined.

And therefore, it may be added, they *are his by a mystical and perfect union*—members of his body, of his flesh, of his bones ; animated by one soul, and constituting one body ; for

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

*“he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.”*¹

This union then, is not a mere union of love and affection ; as we speak of a friend being to us another self. Such a oneness of heart and desire does indeed exist between the Redeemer and his members, between the Vine and the branches: but this partakes of a still higher nature. That is a *moral*, this a *mystical* oneness. That engages our affections; this joins our very persons to the Lord. *“The church is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”*¹ Here is the dignity, here the excellence, here the security, here the sanctification, here the hope that maketh not ashamed; here the unsealed and open fountains of a joy unspeakable and full of glory. For if we thus are Christ's, then doth He care for us, as the Good Shepherd for his sheep. Then doth his Father, the great Husbandman, prune the branch of the true Vine that it may bear fruit. Then will He spare us in the hour of judgment and visitation, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then will He intercede for us, *that if “any sin we may have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”*² Then will He teach us as we are able to bear the lessons of his love ;

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

² 1 John ii. 1.

and give rest to our souls in the instruction. Then will He rebuke our wanderings with gentle chastisement, and restore us in pity to his fold. Then will He guide us with his counsel, and afterward receive us to glory.

It may now be asked, *What are the privileges of this happy state?* If nothing can separate the members from the body, then, what shall separate Christians from the love of Christ? If in virtue of this union they have an interest in all that He possesses, what, except their own restraint in prayer instead of the open-heartedness of filial pleading and petition, can prevent them from being filled with all the fulness of God? If He is their Shepherd, how can they want? If they have communion with Him, as the bride with her Husband, how high their distinctions, how inestimably rich their dowry! If they have been planted together in the likeness of his death, how surely also in the likeness of his resurrection! If they have been made kings and priests unto God, in virtue of that communion, and of his double office, how infallibly shall they sit on his throne, and serve in his temple world without end! If their *worst* things are his, even their sins which He hath accounted his own, taken upon Himself by imputation, and hidden from the eye of

a sin-avenging God, as in the depths of the sea, how securely may they rest in the persuasion that these iniquities, mourned over, hated, and forsaken, shall not be laid to their charge ! If in all their afflictions He is afflicted—if He bore their griefs, and carried their sorrows—if He is reviled in their reproaches, and hath the unfailing kindness of an intimate sympathy in all their sufferings, how needfully must the light affliction which is but for a moment, work for them a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory ! If on the other hand, they have communion with Him in their *best* things—(every one of them derived, and only derivable from that fulness which filleth all in all) then must all that good be sure and perfect. Their temporal mercies will be real blessings, in the covenant of their Father's love,—streams from the nether springs of his providential goodness ; and yet communicating by mysterious channels with the unfathomable depths of the upper springs, in his kindness towards them through Christ Jesus. Their instatement in spiritual mercies may never be successfully challenged. A violated law cannot condemn them ; for they are made the righteousness of God in Christ. Satan may plead against them, as the unwearied accuser of the brethren ; but their cause hath

been undertaken by Him who hath already bruised the serpent's head. Satan may claim to pay them the wages of sin, eternal death : but the dreadful hire, which this great enemy would not only tender, but force upon them, will be put aside by God, who hath, both by power and by price, bestowed upon them that gift of his own grace which is eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. If their fellowship be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, the transforming and sanctifying efficacy of that communion will certainly be imparted. *“Beholding with open face as in a glass the glory of the Lord, they will be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”* *“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, who is one with their spirit, will make them free from the law of sin and death. They are dead, and their life is hid with Christ in God ; and when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with Him in glory.”*¹

I defer the conclusion to be drawn from the *Apostle's supposition* to another occasion. But I would appeal to you whether, if these things be so, there should be rest to our souls in any

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18. Rom. viii. 2. Col. iii. 3, 4.

peradventure touching a point so momentous, as the spiritual union between every believer, and the glorious object of his faith? *If ye be Christ's—?* The decision of the question involves nothing vain or trivial, for it is our life; or rather it involves the awful alternative of life or death eternal. He who believeth not is without part in the Saviour and salvation of God's revealed word. He is condemned already by that law which he has broken, and by that gospel which he is neglecting. He is grievously sinning against all his baptismal privileges; and his "*circumcision will be accounted to him for uncircumcision.*"¹

And is this a condition wherein one who professes to receive the Scriptures, and to use them as the mirror wherein to behold his circumstances, his obligations, his duties, and his prospects, should be contented to dwell? "*What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God.*"² If ye be not Christ's—his subjects, his property, his members, the abodes of his saving power, and the dwelling places of his grace, by whom are ye vanquished, owned, and tenanted? And shall not this tremendous covenant with eternal death, and with the grave

¹ Rom. ii. 25.

² Jonah i. 6.

of every hope be annulled? He only can break it, unto whom all power in heaven and earth is given, to be the Deliverer of doomed, and dying men. While He proclaims your imminent and infinite peril, as plainly as the truth of the Holy Ghost can utter it, are we not commissioned to invite you to behold in Him "*the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world?*"¹ Are we not to beseech you in his stead, to take refuge in Him from the penalty and power, the guilt and misery of your transgressions? Our preaching is but the faint echo of his own voice. "*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*"² "*Turn ye then, turn ye, for why will ye die?*"

Are these things so? Are blessings such as I have mentioned, blessings more than angels, whatever may be the depth of angelic desire or the spaciousness of angelic intellect, could fully look into or comprehend, linked to the happy distinction of being Christ's? Then what manner of persons ought ye to be who profess this hope, as the glorious hope of your calling? "*He that saith he abideth in the Saviour, ought also himself so to walk, even as He walked.*" "*They that are Christ's, have cru-*

¹ John i. 29.

² Ibid vi. 37.

*cified the flesh, with its affections and lusts."*¹ Judge therefore yourselves brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord. Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves. If the Lord of life and glory has indeed a property in you unto salvation, then is He the great allurements of your hearts, the supreme desire of your affections. Then will it be your chief delight to serve Him. You will labour to "*cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*"² The door of your hearts, through which the Prince hath entered will be closed against the willing admission of any idol god to rival Him, or usurp his throne in that sanctuary.³ *Dwell then in love: for "he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."*⁴ *If ye live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit.*⁵ And while you rejoice in all the extent of blessing, and all the magnificence of hope which this mutual inhabitancy involves, keep your eyes fixed upon that city which hath foundations whose Builder and Maker is God—which his word has described under so many images of material splendour, all to be infinitely and eternally surpassed by the

¹ 1 John ii. 6. Gal. v. 24. ² 2 Cor. vii. 1. ³ Ezek. xlv. 3.

⁴ 1 John iv. 16.

⁵ Gal. v. 25.

reality:—the wall of jasper, the pavement of gold, the gates of pearl, the foundations of precious stones; and, (to crown the whole,) the Lord its everlasting light, and the Lamb its glory.

SERMON II.

THE HEIRS OF PROMISE.

GALATIANS III. 29.

IF YE BE CHRIST'S, THEN ARE YE ABRAHAM'S SEED, AND
HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE.

It was not the least among many wonderful peculiarities of the Gospel, that its mighty salvation should be preached to the Gentiles, not in the first instance by converts, whom the Holy Spirit had made among themselves, but by Jews, who held them to be accursed, and would gladly have thrust them beyond the pale of mercy. Out of the very people, who would have locked up the kingdom of heaven from them, and cast the key of it into the depths of the sea, where a Gentile might never find it, men were raised up, who threw it open as entirely, in all its extent of divine love, as the Holy of Holies was made accessible, when the vail of the temple was rent in twain, at the Redeemer's death. Here was in itself a strong and happy

presumption to the aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, that the salvation of God was indeed intended for them. And when St. Paul, especially commissioned to be the Apostle of the Gentiles, shewed how the middle wall of partition had been broken down, it became clear that "*the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the Spirit's promise in Christ by the Gospel.*"¹

This cheering assurance of absolute irrespectiveness on the part of God, is continually brought forward in the Apostle's preaching and Epistles. He labours, as it were, to shew to those who might otherwise have doubted it, the Saviour's gracious impartiality; even as He Himself stated it to the Jews—"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring with Me, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd."² It is his high delight to testify, as loudly as to any other Scriptural truth, that "*there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ all and in all,*"³ among the members of his renewed church. In like manner does he address the converts of Galatia. He

¹ Ephes. iii. 6.² John x. 16.³ Coloss. iii. 11.

testifies by arguments the most invincible, that every blessing bestowed by God upon Abraham, in absolute mercy, through faith, was equally the property of any believer, whether descended by natural birth from the friend of God, or nationally a stranger to him and his posterity. "*If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*"

I have endeavoured to shew you what the supposition in the text implied; and the extent of blessed meaning involved in the emphatic term, "*If ye be Christ's.*"

I now proceed to consider, for the believer's furtherance and joy of faith,

II. THE CONCLUSION DEDUCED FROM THIS SUPPOSITION. *If ye be Christs' then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* It is sufficiently clear, that in the literal meaning of the terms, this statement could not be true. The Galatians had no portion among the natural and national kindred of the father of the faithful. From any distinctions arising out of these relations, they were as much severed, as if Judæa and Galatia had been placed at opposite extremities of the world. We are consequently compelled to give the Apostle's words their plain meaning, by a spiritual inter-

pretation. Indeed it would have been a poor and mean ambition to have wished for merely civil and ecclesiastical adoption into the family of Abraham after the flesh, on the part of those, who being Christ's, by the Father's gift, the weighty purchase of the cross, their baptismal investiture, their mystical union with the Saviour's body, and their own gracious surrender, possessed in these distinctions the highest honour, and the deepest sources of happiness, which man can enjoy. But it was another matter, one of dear and delightful interest, one to which they might well aspire, to be thus made partakers of all the spiritual blessings possessed by Abraham, as a spiritual man, and made over to all his spiritual descendants. To this point of joy and consolation the Apostle labours to bring the Galatians, in the argument before us, which closely resembles that used by him in the 4th Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. And we learn from it, that

1. *Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are the spiritual seed of Abraham.*

The patriarch stands in two, and those widely different relations to his posterity. He is the parent of a natural offspring, sons and daughters; the father of many nations. Among them were

the children of the bond-woman, even of Hagar, who were not to be partakers of his name and substance. Among them, moreover, were all his children by Sarah,—the whole nation of the Jews,—merely considered as acknowledging him to be their natural father, but having no interest in the spiritual mercies vouchsafed to him; because they had no moral and spiritual resemblance to him as their father, believing and justified of God, and therefore no portion in the blessings of his God as believers. Among them were some who cried concerning Abraham's Saviour, on whom his heart had leaned for mercy almost two thousand years before He appeared on earth, "Crucify Him, crucify Him: his blood be upon us, and upon our children." And while they boasted of their high progenitor, (as well they might, if they had wisely boasted,) "we have Abraham for our father," the Lord rebuked the empty pride that condemned themselves; and shewed them what they really were, not according to the genealogies of men, of which birth and burial embrace the little all, but according to the state wherein their unbelief placed them before God, "*If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. Ye are of*

your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”¹

I said, it was no mean prerogative to be born from such an ancestor: for when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, “*He took not on Himself the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham.*” “*Of him as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is God over all, blessed for ever.*”² But while their hearts exhibited no likeness to the heart of their illustrious father, they could not be his children in spirit and in truth. The blood of nature which ran through Abraham’s veins, had no respect to the grace which was planted in Abraham’s heart. “*He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*”³ Here then, is a subject well worthy the earnest consideration of every professing Christian,—that is, of every one assuming to be a child of God. Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac, the

¹ John viii. 39, 44.

² Heb. ii. 16. Rom. ix. 5.

³ Rom. ii. 28, 29.

child of the promise,—the type of true believers in the Lamb of God,—the heir of his father's faith, as well as of his flocks, and herds, and lands. But unto the sons of the concubines which he had, he merely gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son. It is a solemn and startling truth, that men may take and taste the common and prudential bounties of God in large and liberal measure; even as He makes his rain to fall on the evil and on the good, and causes his sun to shine upon the just and upon the unjust; and yet they may be the while, without any of that happy inheritance of peace and life, which He has given, as the gracious birthright of those, who, being justified by faith, are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Esau cried, "I have enough, my brother," when Jacob made an offering to him: and yet he had no birthright, no spiritual inheritance in Jacob's real blessing. O far from us, be the sad and soul-destroying error of imagining that we need no more, if only we have a full portion in this world's abundance! Far from us may it ever be, to rest in calmness and content, until, regarding God in Christ as our own, we can discern his favour as man's true happiness; and, while

many are saying, “*Who will shew us any good?*” may cry, “*Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!*”¹

The merely natural children of Abraham were under the Law,—the objects of its curse and condemnation, at the very moment when they were filled with a vain glorious pride, which made them put away salvation, as preached to them in the Lord Jesus Christ, and so to judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. The veil was upon their hearts, and they could not discern the truth of their state. As the close gauze of wire that encircles the flame in the safety lamp hinders it from enkindling the inflammable air without, so did the prejudices of the Jews hinder them from seeing their real state, and their only hope, and from having their hearts inflamed with love to Jesus. And their error should ring the knell of all legal hope, in every self-justiciary. Whereby was Abraham justified and saved?² For his excellent virtues and holy works? Because he forsook his kindred, country, and father’s house? Because he was circumcised and observed the law? Because, at the divine command, he prepared to offer

¹ Psalm iv. 6.

² Luther on Galatians.

up Isaac, the child of his prayers, his age, and God's own promise? No; but simply because he was a believer. Even so must we be saved, "*not by works of righteousness which we have done,*" but by cleaving to the same cross, whereon Abraham suspended every hope of his salvation; and as simple believers on Him who justifieth the ungodly. No merely outward fellowship with a pure and apostolic Church, no ecclesiastical distinctions, no imaginary obedience to the law, whither deluded men would gladly flee to be independent of the righteousness of Christ, can give us one the least Gospel blessing, proposed by God, even to the chief of sinners in his Son. Reliance on these broken reeds proves us to be children of the bondwoman. And what is written in the imperishable record of the Holy Ghost? "*Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.*"¹

He who will be free from the law of sin and death must be a child of the *believing* Abraham, beloved and justified: or else he is only the child of the *begetting* Abraham, a man con-

¹ Gal. iv. 30.

ceived, born, and wrapped in sin, without faith, without pardon, without the Holy Ghost, and therefore in condemnation. And it was as reasonable in them who lived during the most benighted period of the Christian Church, to think, that notwithstanding all the transgressions in which they lived and died, they would assuredly be saved if they were buried in the cowl and cassock of a monk, as it would be in any of ourselves, to put our privileges and legal obedience in the stead of Christ, and yet hope for their sakes to avoid the sentence of his wrath, "*I never knew you depart from me.*"

But Abraham's seed,—they in whom he has the right of a spiritual paternity, and they in him the privileges of a blessed parentage as his spiritual offspring, are believers in Jesus Christ: and they are of no particular clime, country, sex, people, language; but, of all. These are they who shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.¹ The New Testament has taught us, that the promise of an innumerable progeny made to Abraham, though literally fulfilled, had a farther meaning;

¹ See also Isaiah xliii. 5—7.

and is to be understood of all who are partakers of like precious faith with him, whether Jews or Gentiles. “*Unto Abraham, and unto his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many, but, as of one; and to thy seed, which is Christ.*”¹ “Thus then the great and gracious paradisaical promise was republished and confirmed. The blessing in the latter edition, is, under a new form, essentially the same, of which assurance was given in the former; for that general blessing is the bruising of the serpent’s head, or the destruction of the works of the devil,”² and the victorious salvation of God’s Incarnate Son, whereby He hath opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

There is therefore an absolute, and happy identity between this gracious seed of Abraham, and the redeemed, justified, adopted, and holy family of heaven. The establishment of this fact forms the centre, towards which every ray of the apostle’s triumphant and luminous argument had concourse and convergency. “*Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus.*”³ The adoption is the same to all the

¹ Gal. iii. 16.

² Biddulph’s Theology of the early Patriarchs. ii. 114.

³ Gal. iii. 26.

seed of Abraham, whether naturally derived from him, or spiritually engrafted into him. As all pious Jews obtained this happy relation under the Old Testament, so doth every disciple of our gracious Lord under the New. Were they justified freely? So are we, if justified at all. Was righteousness, even the imputed righteousness of Him who magnified the law, and made it honourable, the needful, the perfect, the spotless robe wherein they must be clothed for acceptance with God? Even so must it be our wedding garment. Was faith imputed to their great progenitor, and to them for righteousness? So must it be to us also. *They which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham.*¹ He was justified, not by the act, but by the object of his faith, even “*God in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world to Himself.*”²

(2.) And here let me observe, that if the Holy Spirit hath graciously gifted us with the purged and purified vision of faith, He opens to our view the second part of his conclusion. “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, *and heirs according to the promise*, even of that most precious assurance, on which the believing

¹ Gal. iii. 9.

² 2 Cor. v. 19.

patriarch leaned, when he stretched his :
far down the stream of ages, and saw the de
Christ, to his joy and rejoicing. "*In thy*
shall all the families of the earth be blesse
He saw what every spiritual child, gracie
descended from himself, is privileged to beh
pardon, remission, reconciliation, adoption
the family of God, and all the immunities,
all the bestowments of unrestrained and inf
love, in their great treasure house, God
Christ. But who shall open all the bless
which this high relation embraces and inclu
Behold what manner of love the Father
bestowed upon the true seed of Abraham,
they should be called the sons of God, the
and daughters of the Lord Almighty! ¹
shall describe the mercies linked to this
adoption of the Father's love towards his
dren in the grace of faith? "*If children,*
heirs : heirs of God, and joint heirs
Christ." ²

O how insufficiently, how unworthily,
dishonourably to their Father's love, how i
riously to themselves, do the children of
Most High, the members of his Son's body,

¹ Gen. xxviii. 14.

² Rom. viii. 17.

the heirs of that glory, which the Son Himself in his human nature enjoys, overlook their privileges and possessions ! How little are they accustomed to that large-heartedness of gracious feeling, whereby to comprehend “ *the length, and breadth, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and to be filled with all the fulness of God !*”¹

Therefore it is, that the children of God remain needy and unsupplied. Therefore it is, that they are weak and unfruitful. Therefore it is, that they halt and loiter, and that their souls cleave to the dust, when they should mount up on the wings of a lighter and more faithful vision of their mercies, as eagles; *when they should run and not be weary, when they should walk and not faint.*² Why do not these heirs of God take to themselves the blessedness of their heritage by anticipation, until they realize the whole in its enjoyment ? They have the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as their possession. All covenant blessings are their own, made over to them in Baptism, and sealed anew in the Supper of the Lord. The blessing of

¹ Eph. iii. 18, 19.

² Isaiah xl. 31.

ordinances; the blessings of the means of grace; the blessings of God's own word, with all its exceeding great and precious promises, belong to them: yet they see them not in all their loveliness, nor feel them in all their power. The Lord increase your faith. O that the "*God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.*"¹

Surely if the heirs of salvation would be borne above the earth, to have their conversation in heaven, they should be more familiar with the treasure of their rich inheritance. Their faith would then be like the bow of Jonathan, and the sword of Saul, which never returned empty. Besetting sins would be trodden down, and iniquity would be as ashes under the soles of their feet. They would be made more than conquerors in all assaults of their spiritual enemies, and triumph in the midst of conflict.

¹ Ephes. i. 17.

"Heirs according to the promise." The seal of every engagement to them being the blood of Christ; the seal of every engagement *in* them, being the witness of the Spirit; one of whose most endearing titles, to an experimental Christian, describes Him as "*the Holy Spirit of promise.*"¹ What an assurance of happiness doth this name contain and convey! What a pledge of life eternal! There is not a promise revealed in the book of God, of which the believer may not expect the performance at the hand of the Holy Ghost. He is the spirit *in* the promise, as its very life and essence. He is the spirit *of* the promise, being a party in the divine mind who gave it, and the person in the divine nature who accomplishes it to the heirs of promise, according to that "*everlasting covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure.*" *Heirs of God.* In other heritages, many a seemingly copious stream is comparatively dried up by dispersion into a great variety of channels; but here the number of co-heirs cannot diminish that blessedness of each, which is furnished by the inexhaustible sufficiency of Him who filleth all in all. The same light may be

¹ Serle's *Horæ Solitariae*, II. 411.

² Sam. xiii. 5.

seen by millions, yet its fountain in the sun suffers no diminution. And when the all-sufficiency of God, the merit of his Son, and the omnipotence of the Holy Ghost, provide for the objects of their love, what blessings can be wanting to them within the limits of time, or the illimitable eternity that will succeed? The heir indeed is maintained by guardians during his nonage; but even the present possession comes from his own property. It is a portion of the revenue appertaining to him, according to the law of his inheritance. And thus it is with the heirs of God, and the joint heirs with Christ. They will never want a present portion, for “*God shall supply all their need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*”¹ And in what they have, they enjoy their own, those first-fruits which are the pledges, and earnest, and foretastes of the glorious harvest, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. The whole inspired volume is more full of God’s condescension to the lowest and meanest member of his church, than to the highest and proudest of those who do not belong to it; even as He

¹ Phil. iv. 19.

gave more minute directions concerning the very pins, and snuffers, and basins of the tabernacle, than concerning any matter of mere earthly magnificence.

A Christian should be enabled habitually to summon this witness of the Spirit with his spirit,—with his conscience purged by the blood of Christ, for testimony that he is indeed a child of God, by spiritual principles and feelings suitable to, and concurring with, his baptismal relation. The testimony should be practical. And when the Christian's experience sees the spirit of Jesus not only resting upon the Head, but descending to the lowest member of his mystical body, making rich even himself, as one of them ; impressing holy principles and motions upon his soul ; transforming him into a man wholly different from what he was in nature ; giving that impulse from the Head, which makes the feet move in unison to its impulses and suggestions, and run with delight the way of God's commandments, then by the same Spirit he may know that he is united to Christ, a child of God, and if a child, then an heir—an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ. It surely befits the heir of an earthly heritage, to preserve his muniment room in

order; and every document in due place, that he may be able to lay his hand on each, as each is needed, if any enemy should challenge his right in the inheritance, and so that he may thus remain in peace. And the heirs of glory—are not they concerned to keep their evidences bright, beaming, clear, and ready to their hand? Are not they concerned to use all diligence to make their calling and election sure? So that if the accuser of the brethren should charge them with making an unrighteous claim to the mercies of God, for which he may deny their title, they may be enabled to rebuke him upon the authority of the word of God, and bid him get behind them.

Yet on the other hand, when these evidences may be blotted and almost illegible,—though the miscarriages of God's children may have made them so, they should not lightly question the love of God, and think that all is lost. The money may be in the sack's mouth, when yet the sons of Jacob do not see it. The Lord of the land may be their brother, though their eyes may be holden awhile, that they cannot see Him. He may be carrying on his designs of infinite love; although his mysterious dealing may give his brethren hard thoughts con-

cerning Him. Are any of you thus tempted? Remember your experiences, as comments upon the promises. Look up in faith to Him who restores the soul; and rest persuaded that He will yet restore unto you the manifestations of his love, and give you peace.

The heir of God, however, according to the promise of faithful Abraham, should never expect, never desire, never admit happiness to his heart, except in the path of holiness. Cheerful, filial obedience is the best outward mark and manifestation of the spiritual seed of Abraham. Live then, ye who thus believe, and trust yourselves to be the objects of adopting grace—live, not upon your privileges, but upon your Saviour. The life which ye now live in the flesh, let it appear to be carried on by the faith of the Son of God, who loved you and gave Himself for you. If you are indeed translated from the bondage of corruption, into the gracious liberty of the children of God, “*walk worthy of Him who hath called you to his kingdom and glory.*” If you are made priests unto God, see that ye remember your high consecration; and keep yourselves unspotted from

the world, in holiness to the Lord. If you have been advanced to become kings, with all the co-heirs of Christ, then remember, that it is an essential privilege as well as a duty of that royalty to reign over your corruptions, and to subdue your iniquities, by the power of an indwelling Saviour. His glorious title of King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, is by no proof more clearly known in the church, than by the experienced exercise of his royalty, in casting down the power, as well as removing the guilt of sin. It must "*not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*"¹ Be careful, that your obedience, instead of being interrupted and partial, may resemble the sun's course through the zodiac. It misses no sign, it turns aside from no constellation; but traverses them all with undeviating steadiness and regularity. Watch against all omissions of duty, not less than against the commission of sin. It was the earnest prayer of that great luminary of the Anglican church, Archbishop Usher, when his brightness was just about to set, and leave only the radiant track of his example, 'Gracious Lord, pardon me for

¹ Rom. vi. 14.

thy dear Son's sake, all my sins, and especially my sins of omission.' That Christian greatly dishonours his Saviour, and his Father, and his Sanctifier, whose obedience is like the filial duty of Esau, when he was willing to fetch venison which Isaac might eat, hoping for a blessing and his birthright in that obedience; while yet he would not hearken to his father's voice, in a higher matter, but chose a wife for himself, in plain contrariety to his father's will. Be yours the Psalmist's prayer, and yours shall be the Psalmist's peace; "*O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.*"¹

¹ Psalm cxix. 5.

SERMON III.

THE DIVINE CALLING OF ABRAM.

GENESIS XII. 1.

NOW THE LORD HAD SAID UNTO ABRAM, GET THEE OUT OF THY COUNTRY, AND FROM THY KINDRED, AND FROM THY FATHER'S HOUSE, UNTO A LAND THAT I WILL SHEW THEE.

IF a bridge were to be thrown across a wide and rapid river, the builder would probably see good, should it be practicable, to raise a pier in the mid-stream; so that the strain upon the extremities might be supported, and the sense of security and comfort increased. Such a measure (if I may so speak) would in its degree resemble the procedure of the Most High, in the developement of his eternal counsels for the salvation of sinners. A long period intervened between the fall of man, and the advent of his Redeemer. It seemed as though faith and hope would need some intermediate support—some-

thing visible to the church's eye, and firm beneath the church's footing, which might connect the first promise of salvation in Eden, with the amazing act, whereby it was effected upon Calvary. Very graciously and wisely was this want supplied. Abram, the friend of God, and, representatively the father of a spiritual posterity, appeared not far from the middle period between that wherein the first Adam ruined, and the second Adam redeemed the world. Thenceforward the way of life, cast up in the Lamb of God became more plain and cheerful to those who lived in faith upon his future manifestation and office. The saints passed along that gracious path in clearer views of Jehovah's love and purpose. They had not indeed received the promises, in the humiliation of the Son of God, by the assumption of our flesh; but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them.

I proceed now, to enter more immediately upon the history of Abram (for such was his original name) as one upon which the Holy Spirit has stamped an impress of importance, greater than upon any other of the Old Testament saints. And may that God who was his shield, and his exceeding great reward, make us

partakers of like precious faith ; that we may be blessed with faithful Abram.

We have already seen how unworthily the mind of God, in this instructive portion of his word, would be apprehended were it to be read as a mere historical record, from which we could only draw some moral or philosophical conclusions ; such as might be supposed to arise from studying the history of any other illustrious individual, or the changes of states and empires. We should thus overlook the two great objects which a reader of God's revelation in the Bible ought ever to keep in view,—his supreme glory in Christ Jesus ; and the manner in which all his procedures have been directed to subserve the good and glory of his Church. We have a personal, an immediate, an infinitely important interest in the life and providences of One, with whom God sealed the covenant of salvation. If then we are to derive instruction really useful from this portion of the Bible, it will be needful to regard Abram in a double point of view. We must endeavour to trace and follow out the leadings of a great principle, into the obligations and details of social life, by exhibiting the power and efficacy of faith. And we must regard the patriarch himself, as an

illustrious type of the Church collective, as its earthly federal head, to the end of all things ; and the land of Canaan, whither he journeyed, as a dim, though very intelligible representation of the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

With this understanding, for which the whole tenour of Scripture is unquestionable and ample authority, I proceed to examine

THE COMMAND GIVEN TO ABRAM.

“ The Lord had said to him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.”

Any due investigation of this solemn and authoritative precept must necessarily begin with

(I.) *A consideration of Abram's state and circumstances when he received it.* The deluge had overwhelmed the race of man ; but it could not wash away the pollution and power of sin from those whom mercy had vouchsafed to spare, that they might repopulate the world, and become the ancestry of the Church. Scarcely a century after the flood we find the impious attempt to build the tower of Babel frustrated by an express interposition from heaven. The

inhabitants of the plain of Shinar or Chaldea, laid the foundation of their work in pride and vanity; and it was levelled, as every thing so based must be, with the dust. The posterity of Shem, from whom was to be born the promised Saviour of the world, had sunk into a sad disposition to intermingle idolatry with their reverence towards the true God. They did not indeed worship gods of wood and stone, the work of men's hands; but the frequent appearances of the Word of Jehovah in a human form soon led to hero worship. This hero worship was from the first immediately associated with astronomical superstition, and an idolatrous reverence for the great lights of heaven.¹ Such a superstition was perhaps the first and most natural step which the evil heart of unbelief could take, when it departed from the uncreated and invisible God. But it was not on this account the less guilty. "Thou shalt have no other gods beside Me," is the especial command of the Most High; and fearfully does that man mistake, who deems himself to be no idolater but a worshipper of Jehovah, because his idol is not so hideous to the eye, so

¹ Faber on the Three Dispensations, I. 15, 246, &c.

revolting to the understanding, nor so debasing to the moral sense, as those which he sees others serving. If Newton himself had so fearfully abused the powers of his mighty mind, as to esteem his knowledge of the material world, and all its beautiful machinery to be the chief good—and had forgotten to give the glory where it was due, he would have been an idolater as flagrant as Nebuchadnezzar, when he said concerning the city of his pride, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty;” or as if he had joined the cry of those who shouted “Great is Diana of the Ephesians;” or as if he had exchanged places with the most miserable heathen who ever cast himself beneath the wheels of Juggernaut. We are equally under the curse and condemnation of an offended God, whether we depart from Him to follow the delusions of an infidel speculation and philosophy, like that which now wages in Christendom its fierce and unmitigable warfare against the Bible; or whether we are enslaved by those grosser works of the flesh—drunkenness, rioting, chambering, wantonness, Sabbath-breaking, profaneness, or any other of those iniquities, for the sake of

which cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. We are not indeed to suppose that the family of Abram was *wholly* given up to idolatry, for Jehovah is called the God of Nahor;¹ but they had very deeply imbibed the almost universal corruption of the times; according to the testimony of Joshua, “*Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood, in old time, even Terah the father of Abram, and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.*”² True religion was indeed miraculously kept alive in the family of Shem, who lived until Isaac was fifty years old; but it was preserved, as a spark ready to be extinguished, or as life in one about to give up the ghost.

The confusion of languages at the dispersion of Babal, was the confusion of religion; and the darkness which fell upon the world, continued to cover and delude it, until the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, in the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost. The veil that was spread over all nations at Babel, was taken away at Mount Zion.³ In the mean time, however, it was needful that a particular nation should be

¹ Gen. xxxi. 53.

² Joshua xxiv. 2.

³ Lightfoot's Works, 8vo. VIII. 376.

expressly separated from the idolatrous world, to become the depository of saving truth ; to receive the types and prophecies, which testified of Christ, his coming, his sufferings, and the glory that should follow. This people were to prepare the way of his advent to the world ; to preserve the oracles of God ; to fulfil the divine intention concerning the Saviour's birth ; and to be the point from whence the Sun of Righteousness might go forth to the rest of the world, "as a bridegroom cometh out of his chamber, and rejoice as a strong man to run a race." These great purposes could not have been well answered, if the people of God had been mixed for two thousand years among the heathen. The call of Abram, therefore, might be considered as a foundation for the church of Christ in a more distinct and regular state.¹ "*O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and goodness of God how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !*"²

The land of our nativity, in a spiritual point of view, is not the land of promise. Nature and grace are countries widely separated, and no man can be a citizen of both. The city of

¹ Edwards' History of Redemption. Works. V. 45.

² Rom. xi. 33.

sin has no community of people, laws, customs, king, privilege, or religion, with the city of salvation in Jesus Christ. Our original home is under the god of this world, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience, and the irreconcilable enemy of the God of heaven. Adoption into the inheritance of the saints in light, is utterly inconsistent with conformity to a world that lieth in wickedness. Abram, beyond Euphrates, was beyond the limits of the spiritual territory of God; for he was in the land of idolatry: and therefore, he must hear and obey the command, Get thee out of thy country, into another, and a very different country—the type of Immanuel's land, in grace and glory.

Many commentators have contended for a double call of Abram: one in Ur of the Chaldees, before the death of Terah; and another after that event took place; and apparently with good reason. Two several calls of God are made to Abram, one in Chaldea, the other in Haran. His first summons was a general command to leave the place of his birth, “Ur of the Chaldees.” “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred;” but it makes no mention of his father's house; for that he took along with

him. The Holy Ghost, indeed, has ascribed the conduct of this journey to Terah, (Gen. xi. 31.) as if he had received the call, and had been the chief mover in this sacred migration. But that the call was made to Abram is clear and decisive.¹ He dwelt, therefore, in Haran, until the death of Terah, a period of fourteen years. But when afterwards God calls him from Haran, He bids him depart from *his father's house*, as well as he had done from his country and kindred before. He therefore now leaves his brother Nahor, and all his kindred, Lot excepted, behind him.²

Mesopotamia is often put for that part of Asia which is separated from Syria, by the river Euphrates; and, sometimes more strictly for the country between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, whence indeed it has its name. When St. Stephen therefore affirms, that God appeared unto Abram in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, he takes it in its largest sense, as comprehending Shinar or Chaldea. Abram's subsequent migration was into Syria, where Canaan was situated.

(II.) *The manner wherein this divine commu-*

¹ Joshua xxiv. 2. Acts vii. 2.

² Leighton VIII. 110.

nication was made to Abram, is hidden in much obscurity. The Holy Ghost has not seen good to tell us whether it was given in a dream to the sleeper; in a waking vision of the night; by some secret impulses conveyed to his mind; or in a still higher and more mysterious manner. St. Stephen has described the transaction in terms which seem to point out the second Person in the Godhead, as the Messenger of his own will to the patriarch. *The God of glory* appeared unto, or was seen by, our father Abram. The WORD was often thus described to the early saints, with reference to His Incarnation.¹

That such manifestations were afterwards made to this favoured servant of Jehovah, we cannot doubt.² And the consideration is most cheering; the gracious position in which it places lost and ruined man, most encouraging; the aspect of God's love, in thus going into the wilderness of an idolatrous land, to seek and to save one sheep that was lost, before He came in very deed to make his appointed sojourn upon earth, most endearing; and at the same time, entirely in character with all the stupend-

¹ Psalm xxiv. 7, 8. Isa. xl. 5. lx. 2. 1 Cor. ii. 8.

² Gen. xviii. 1, &c.

ous acts of Incarnate Love. It would therefore, have been unjust to the divine record, were I to have omitted the holy martyr's testimony, and with it my belief, that the words may be literally understood, for the comfort of those who feel in their spiritual unworthiness and destitution, a necessity of knowing that the Lord their Redeemer, hath no limits in the condescension of his saving tenderness.

(III.) Is it asked, *Whence originated this command of God to Abram?* We are at no loss for the answer. It was the spontaneous and unsought interference of divine goodness. It was neither of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who sheweth mercy; and well did the heart of Abram understand it thus to be. As one, whose knowledge and worship of Jehovah were awfully debased by idolatry, he could have no possible claim to the favour of that jealous God, whom his superstition so greatly dishonoured, and surely none to a distinction in the household of salvation, so amazing, as to be called the father of the faithful, and the friend of God. He possessed not even the claim of birthright over his brethren—the usual ground of all outward religious distinctions. For although he is named first among

the sons of 'Terah,¹ yet is it rather with reference to his illustrious station and prerogative in the Redeemer's church, than according to his family standing and privilege. He was seventy-five years old, at the time of going forth from Haran. At this period Terah was dead, aged two hundred and five years; so that at Abram's birth, he must have already lived one hundred and thirty years; whereas he is said to have been seventy years old, when he begat, or began to beget his children, Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Abram, then, was in all probability the youngest of his father's sons. At all events he could not possibly have been the eldest.* The purposes of God were never intended to be exhibited and meted out, according to the order and measure of human expectancies and calculations. Jesse offered his eldest son to Samuel, to be anointed king over Israel; and then all the rest of his children, according to priority of age, before he thought of presenting David, the youngest born. But when the stripling came from the field, the word of the Lord said to

¹ Gen. xi. 27.

* In the same manner it is stated, (Gen. v. 32.) that Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth; where Shem for dignity is named first, as Abraham here, and Japheth the eldest is named last, as Haran in this place.

Samuel, "Arise and anoint him, for this is he." Joseph fully expected his father Jacob to have laid his right hand, for the chief blessing, upon the head of his eldest born Manasseh. The patriarch, however, guided by that unerring Spirit, who then filled and enlightened his mind with prophetic truth, crossed his hands wittingly, to reverse the order wherein Joseph had placed his sons; and by that significant rite gave the birthright to Ephraim the younger. And doth not the tenor of Scripture assure us, that such procedures on the part of Jehovah, in the walk of Providence, are visible patterns of his dealing in the world of grace, even as the material tabernacle was the emblem of that above?

Abram, in this important turning point of his life, was the representative of the whole redeemed and sanctified church—a testimony also to God's undeserved love towards it, and to the absolutely gracious freeness of its salvation in Christ Jesus. Had Abram merit, whereof to present before God? Had he, out of the spontaneous movements of his own mind, endeavoured to gain the love and favour of Jehovah? Or, could there be any value in his subsequent obedience which could make him meet to receive grace, or, to deserve it of con-

gruity?¹ Assuredly not. It is no pleasure to the Almighty that we are righteous; it is no gain to Him that we make our way perfect. God, of mere mercy stretches forth his hand, to bring the wanderer to Himself; vests the covenant of salvation representatively in him; builds up the church mystically upon him; and makes him, in the same manner, the earthly head of the people of God. And He, who is able of the very stones to raise up children unto Abram, deals with his seed, the heirs according to the promise, as He dealt with their great forefather. He bids them “*look unto the rock whence they were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence they were digged.*”² “*It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy that He saves us,*”³ if we are saved at all. Hath He truly raised us from the death of sin, to the life of righteousness; washed us in the blood of the Lamb; clothed us with the pure and spotless robe of an everlasting righteousness; made us temples for Himself, and formed us for his glory? And shall the mighty benefit be ascribed to any thing in ourselves;

¹ Art. XIII.

² See Ezekiel xvi. 1—14, as a model of divine procedure in the call and conversion of sinners.

³ Titus iii. 5.

or shall the praise be given to the glory of his hand—that being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith He hath loved us, even when we were dead in our sins, He hath quickened us, together with Christ, even as He rescued Abram from the spiritual alienation of his dwelling in Chaldea ?

(IV.) *The command and call given to Abram were effectual and saving.* The outward calls of God to sinners, whereby He enjoins them to repent and believe, to the saving of their souls, are many, and varied in their circumstances. He summons thoughtless, unbelieving, rebellious men, by the smiles of his daily bounty; by trying afflictions, the frequent monitors of his solicitude; by solemn or cheerful providences; by the still small voice of his goodness; by the earthquake, and the whirlwind, and the fire of his power; by the preaching, or reading of his word; by the conversation and examples of those who serve Him; and by other means and appliances of his grace. But the heart of man can resist them all. It can remain unconverted, though one rose from the dead, to give his experimental evidence of the joys or terrors of the invisible world. “If a man should rise, I say, from the dead, and truly relate unto the con-

science the woeful and everlasting horrors of hell; if a man's natural capacity were made as wide to apprehend the wrath, fury, and vengeance of a provoked God; the foulness, guilt, and venom of the soul, (fuller of sins than the heaven of stars,) as the most intelligent of the lost spirits conceive them; if an Archangel or Seraph should be sent from heaven, to reveal unto the soul of a natural man the infinite glory of God's presence, the full pleasures of his right hand, the admirable beauty of his ways, the intimate conformity and resemblance between his divine nature and Himself, and the image of his holiness in the creature, the unsearchable and unfathomable love of Christ, in his incarnation and sufferings, the endless incomprehensible virtue and preciousness of his blood and prayers; yet, so desperately evil is the heart of man, that, if after all this, God should not afford the blessed operation and concurrence of his own gracious Spirit, the revelation of his own arm and power upon the soul, to set on those instrumental causes, it would be invincible by any evidence, which all the cries and flames of the place of torment, which all the armies and hosts of heaven were able to produce. There is no might or power able to snatch a

man out of the hands of his sin, but only the Spirit of God.'¹

The Spirit's Almightyness must attend his own call, if, instead of stopping just within the porches of the ear, to be driven thence by the first sound of earthliness and sin that enters there, that call shall become the power of God unto salvation. We prophecy unto the bones, and say, *O ye dry bones, hear ye the word of the Lord :*"² but they remain without motion, sense, or life, until the Spirit of God enters into them, and makes them live. He opens the heart to receive the word, like that of Lydia, when she attended to the things that were spoken of Paul. Then only will the cry of an earnest desire be uttered, "*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*"³ Whence otherwise doth it happen, that one attendant upon the ordinances of religion shall be rapt up in them to heaven, as Elijah in the chariot of fire ; while another remains like Elisha, below upon the earth ? No power of moral persuasion enables the sinner to cast off the enmity of his carnal mind, and to glory in the service of God ; but only that same act of Omnipotence, whereby Matthew was called from the receipt of custom ; or Saul

¹ Bp. Reynolds, p. 343.

² Ezek. xxxvii. 4.

³ 1 Sam. iii. 9.

from his errand of cruelty ; or the Jews who persecuted the Lord of glory, from their unbelief ; or Lazarus from the corruption of the grave ; or the Lord Jesus Christ Himself from the tomb, before He saw that corruption. “ The heirs of salvation ” are called according to God’s purpose, by the Spirit, working in due season : they through grace obey the call : they are made sons of God by adoption : they are made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ : they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God’s mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.¹ This effectual calling, partaken in common with Abram, by every believer, is to him the mysterious centre of two eternities ; and here two everlasting arms meet to embrace him, with a love which hath been felt towards him before all worlds ; and which shall be communicated to him for infinite blessedness, when time and years shall be no more.

(V.) *The nature of God’s command to Abram, was decided and peremptory.* “ Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee.” The country, which had hitherto bounded all his desires, was to be forsaken. The charities

¹ Art. XVII.

of home, with all the endearment of natural affections; the very roof that had sheltered him, and ministered to his daily comforts; that had been the depository of his joys and trials; all these were to be left behind him. And this separation was to be made, at a time of life, when, even in that day of greater longevity, the adventurous propensities of our nature must have begun to act with diminished power; and the love of ease, was silently, but surely obtaining its triumph over the spirit of enterprise. If those over whom his affections yearned, would be the companions of his journey—well: if not, that journey must be made alone. The command was given in terms as absolute, as those which startled Lot from remaining beneath the impending fires of Sodom. “*Escape for thy life; look not behind thee.*”¹ They were the same which God invariably uses in the whole economy of his mercy for man’s salvation. “*Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and I will be a Father unto you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*”² No

¹ Gen. xix. 17.² 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

common sacrifice was enjoined, when the master must leave his servants; the head of the family, his house; the herdsman, his flocks; the relation, his kindred; the patriot, his country; and above all, the idolater, the superstitions to which he was wedded;—when he must consider a continuance among them to be an impiety against the God of heaven, from which it was an expression of infinite mercy to deliver him. But, as on the one hand, wrath and judgment awaited him, if he remained; and on the other, a country typical of salvation, lay before him, he permitted not himself to doubt concerning the course which it was his wisdom to adopt.

Came this command then, alone to Abram? or doth not the Author and Finisher of faith within man's soul, declare the like in his word to every one who hears its good tidings of great joy? "*Hearken, O daughter, and consider; incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: so shall the King have pleasure in thy beauty: for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him.*"¹ In terms so strict—in calls of duty so uncompromising, does the Spirit speak unto the church; and bids her

¹ Psalm xlv. 10, 11.

arise, and meet, embrace, and supremely love her adorable Bridegroom. He *demand*s our service, as well as He *deserve*s it. By creation, by redemption, by covenant obligation in Baptism, we are bound to honour and obey Him. "*We are not our own, but are bought with a price ; and should therefore glorify God, in our bodies, and in our spirits, which are God's.*"¹ Christ and the world, are elements that cannot mingle—opposites, between which there can be no reconciliation. His true disciples are not of the world, even as He was not of the world ; and they may be broadly distinguished from those who are cleaving to its dust. No man can serve God and mammon. If therefore, the Saviour comes to invest a man with the blessings of his atonement ; with the righteousness of God in Himself ; with reconciliation, peace, holiness, all-sufficient grace, adoption into the family of heaven, hope that maketh not ashamed, and an inheritance, of which not even angels will be partakers ; He hath surely good right to require a full and absolute separation from every thing, whereby the natural heart is lulled to rest in its idolatries,

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

and satisfied in its dreadful enmity against God. “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him: for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*”¹ Alas for the hope of that unsteadfast and temporizing professor, who will not quit his grasp of earth, that he may cling to his Saviour with all the affections of his soul! Such renunciation is the statute law of discipleship. “*He that loveth father or mother,” saith the Lord, “more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*”² If we would hear the Shepherd’s voice indeed; if we would act as becomes his ransomed flock; and the sheep of his green pasture of salvation; He can speak no language which we should more readily understand, than that whereby He calls us from any sin, however besetting, and any indulgence that contradicts his will, however dear. “*Why halt ye between two opinions?*

¹ 1 John ii. 15, 16.

² Matt. x. 37, 38.

If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow Him." "*If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; and if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee.*"¹ A worldly man will cry, "*This is a hard saying, who can hear it?*" What makes it hard? What makes a professing Christian esteem that call to be severity, which is the yearning, pleading voice of unsearchable love? It is even the deafness of the heart, which prevents a professing Christian from hearing and understanding the privileges of the gospel, promised to those who turn from idols to serve the living and true God. It is the common mistake of using the sight of sense, instead of the sight of faith. And when this error is committed, every trifle of present worldliness, and every seducing transgression intercepts the beauty, happiness, and grandeur of salvation; just as a diminutive insect, passing over the eye-glass of a telescope, would intercept all the magnificence of the landscape that lay beyond the instrument. Hence too, it often happens, in those providential arrangements, whereby the glorified Head of the Church provides for the spiritual growth of its members, and for

¹ 1 Kings xviii. 21.

² Matt. v. 29.

their gracious conformity to Himself, that when they will not forsake their idols, He removes such objects of their perverted love, that they may follow Him with less divided hearts.

The way to Canaan was long, difficult, and toilsome. Rivers were to be crossed, mountains climbed, and deserts traversed: yet Abram must journey onward, and rest not, as in his home, until he entered within the borders of the promised land. Even such is the nature of the Christian pilgrimage. Faith will be sternly tried; hope will be assailed severely; and alarm may come over the mind to depress it. The valley of humiliation must be low; it may often be dark and dreary; and the gracious traveller may stumble as he goes down into it.¹ The wilderness of temptation will have its scorpions and drought, its fiery serpents and its burning sands. But, if the feet of the spiritual way-faring man are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; the immutability of God, the unfailing efficacy of the mediation of Christ, and the absolute fidelity of the Holy Spirit of promise, are at once pledges that he shall hold right onward to the end, and of the glory that shall be imparted to

¹ Pilgrim's Progress.

him, at the revelation of his Lord and Saviour. Even the hills of trial, so painfully climbed, will be spiritual Pisgahs, the Nebos of his gracious experience, the mounts of inviolable promise, whence the land of life may be more distinctly seen, in the atmosphere of a higher faith, than he had upon lower ground; so that he will be encouraged to tread the remainder of the way in more settled peace, and greater assurance of hope.

1. *Hath the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit reached any who are in the decline of life, having long rested in the world, and been satisfied with it as their portion; without reflecting that it passeth away, and the fashion of it is soon to perish?* If so, they may possibly be discouraged, and almost disposed to dread, lest it should be too late; lest the grave should close upon them, before they can reach the better land, whither their Redeemer hath bidden them flee, by the way-marks of salvation in his gospel. O do not resign yourselves to the paralysing influence of unbelieving fears. He who commands the journey, and whose Spirit has at length spoken within your hearts, will give you support to perform it. *“His grace is sufficient for you; and his strength will be*

*made perfect in your weakness."*¹ "*He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."*² Abram was seventy and five years old, when God called him at first from his idolatries; and he was led safely to Canaan, after many trials and afflictions by the way. If you are called into the vineyard of your Saviour's love and cause, even at the eleventh hour, his boundless tenderness and mercy will unite you with those labourers, whose high privilege it is to bear the burden and heat of the day. You shall not taste of *natural* death (of *spiritual* death you shall *never* taste) until you can each say with aged Simeon, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."*³

2. *Are any, still young in years, called in true conversion, by the love of the Eternal Trinity, to leave the land of their idolatries; to join the family of God, and to be followers of those*

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

² Isaiah xl. 29—31.

³ Luke ii. 29.

who through faith and *patience* have inherited the promises? Theirs is a happy state, and theirs a glorious prospect. He who hath thus, not only invited, but quickened them by the power of his converting Spirit to a new and heavenly life, hath given in his testimony to the good part which they have chosen: "*I love them that love me: and they that seek me early shall find me.*"¹ Lot, although much younger than Abram, was made partaker of his journey; and would have enjoyed more of its privileges, if he had trodden more simply in the way of his uncle's faith. Forsake your idols, and embrace your Saviour. Go with the Mnasons of the church, and be followers of them, as they also are of Christ. When you meet, (and especially when you meet among your own kindred,) one, who, like Naomi, is leaving the land of Moab, to dwell in the true Bethlehem of the promised land, take your station by the devoted believer's side, and say, "*Whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.*"² So shall your way be holiness; your companions, the God of peace, and the peace of God, and your end the vision of his glory in the rest and joy of his accomplished kingdom.

¹ Prov. viii. 17.² Ruth i. 16.

SERMON IV.

THE COMMANDMENT WITH PROMISE.

GENESIS XII. 2, 3.

AND I WILL MAKE OF THEE A GREAT NATION, AND I WILL BLESS THEE, AND MAKE THY NAME GREAT, AND THOU SHALT BE A BLESSING: AND I WILL BLESS THEM THAT BLESS THEE, AND CURSE HIM THAT CURSETH THEE; AND IN THEE SHALL ALL FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.

A DIVINE injunction, however briefly made, and however distinct from all other considerations, implies, in the very nature of things, the fitness of an entire obedience. When that emphatic preface, "Thus saith the Lord" introduces any message of the will of God, it involves the creature in obligations which it would be most guilty rebellion to oppose. The sovereignty of Jehovah supposes the absolute subjection of man to its exercise. His Omnipotence can enforce submission. His Wisdom claims to be implicitly trusted. His Beneficence offers an ample pledge that his purposes

are kind : and his holiness gives assurance, that they have unmingled good for their end and object.

When that command therefore was made by the Most High to Abram, "*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy Father's house, unto a land that I will show thee,*" its fulfilment would have been imperatively bound upon him, although no reason should have been given, and if no promise had been annexed. But the condescension of God induced Him to accompany the exercise of sovereign prerogative with such assurances, as, once received into the heart, were powerfully calculated to subdue all opposition, and make obedience, not only prompt, but delightful on the part of Abram. The box of spikenard is partially opened, and the patriarch's soul apprehends so much of its sweetness, as to be refreshed and strengthened for all the sacrifices and self-denials, that lay before him on his journey. And that believer, who carefully links the precept with the promise, as the prophet joined the staves in one, will find a rod thus made for his hand, on which he may safely and happily lean, to "*run with patience the race that is set before him.*"

The command of God, that Abram should forsake his country, his kindred, and his idolatries, to seek a land at once distant and unknown, was the subject of my last discourse. I have now to consider—

THE PROMISES, WHEREBY THE COMMAND WAS ACCOMPANIED.

The whole scheme of Redemption, with all the glory of the Godhead by whom it was to be accomplished, and all the amazing circumstances of its process and completion, was enwrapped in a single promise, which has been unfolding gradually for nearly six thousand years ; and is yet to be evolved ; until it is finally exhibited in the glory of the Mediator, and the salvation of his Church. Every promise of Scripture, is in fact an intermediate and visible link, connecting to a believer's eye those purposes of the divine mind (otherwise hopelessly dark and unintelligible,) with the intention and method of their fulfilment. They are registered in the word of God, for the assurance of faith, and the comfort of those who receive them in singleness and sincerity of heart. All these exceeding great and precious promises are branches of the tree of life, springing forth from the person and mediation of Jesus Christ as their

stem and root. Very many, very beautiful, and very refreshing are their fruits: and those Christian travellers, who would enjoy their sweetness, must pluck them with the hand of faith, and live upon them in the heavenward journey, as Sampson went forwards, eating the honey from the lion's carcase. Thus, and thus only, can they go on their way rejoicing.

Since however, the promises of Scripture, excellent as they are, and transcendantly manifesting divine graciousness, "are only the golden vessel, while God in Christ is the manna contained within," it is needful to consider:

I. THE AUTHOR OF THE PROMISES, AS REVEALED TO THE MIND OF ABRAM.

The Lord, even Jehovah, the Almighty and self-existent God, the Giver of life and happiness, who revealed Himself to the mind of the Patriarch, and brought him into the light and blessedness of covenant engagement and love towards Him, was the source and centre of them all. And no promises will do their full work of goodness on the heart, by making Christians partakers of the divine nature, until, looking through them, God in Christ Jesus reconciling the world to Himself, is realized and appropriated as their well-spring. Faith must

take the warrant of a promise, if it may seek God with hope : but faith can be assured of no saving interest in that promise, except as the believer is persuaded that he hath union with Christ, who, in his mystical person, is the true and proper Object of faith.

And what shall a Christian see, if, like Stephen, he look steadfastly up into heaven, where those promises are deposited with Him who liveth, and was dead, and is alive again for evermore ; and waits at the right hand of the throne of God to dispense them, as Joseph opened the granaries of Egypt, to supply the wants of his brethren ? He will discover *the infinite grace and goodness* of God, whereby every engagement of his love for the salvation of men hath been so freely made, and every blessing is with his Son, offered in absolute mercy, even to the chief of sinners. Those engagements once undertaken, their fulfilment becomes justice ; according to the terms of that covenant wherein the Word undertook with the Father for the whole work of Redemption, and for opening all the stores and fulness of God in Himself. But if we carry our thoughts upwards, and endeavour to look into the origin of these mercies, we can neither find, nor imagine

any other, than the spontaneous goodness of God. And, if after such an enquiry, we draw nearer home, and reflect upon our unworthiness; being experimentally taught that the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint,—that the inherent and actual sin of man, defiles him with pollution which the holy nature of God abhors, we are again assured that his dealing with us, and every promise of love included in it, must have originated in his unspeakable compassion. Such a view is, moreover, not merely the necessary, but the only consolatory one we can take of the subject. The obligations, whereby God hath thus bound Himself, involve the glory of his own Attributes, as well as the honour of his Son; and therefore will be made good. “*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?*”¹

The promises are a glass, wherein *the unchangeable faithfulness of God* may be discovered. These, with “*every other good and perfect gift of free bounty, are from above, and come down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*”² The engagements and promises

¹ Rom. viii. 32.

² James i. 17.

made by Christians converted to His grace, delighting themselves in the multitude of peace, through the atonement, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, are notwithstanding, through the power of indwelling iniquity, often broken, almost as soon as they are uttered. They resemble Jonah's gourd, which came up in a night, and withered in a night; or characters written in sand, which the first tide of temptation effaces. But the promises of God are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, to his praise and glory, not one having failed, not one to fail for ever; unless indeed the Saviour's purchase could lose its merit, or God fail to remember his engagements, made with the Church, in his Son.

Goodness may suffice to make a promise; *but power is necessary to its fulfilment.* And in this consideration the believer will faint, if he withdraw his eye, even for a moment, from the Omnipotence of God, to accomplish every thing which He hath undertaken for his servants and children, in the person and grace of their Redeemer. All power indeed, both in heaven and earth is given unto the Son; and the fulness of God dwells with Him, to complete every engagement, to the letter. And it is a happy

pillow for the repose of faith, that He is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we can ask or think. All must be well if we learn to trust Him, to lean upon Him, and to suspend the weight of our salvation upon the Almightyness of his nature, and the perfection of his mediatorial work.

Nor is *unerring wisdom* the least, although it must be the last attribute to which I can allude, in directing you to God in Christ Jesus, as the great Object of faith in the promises. Men are continually learning, continually enlarging the boundaries of their knowledge; and continually taking credit for the extent of their attainments. Yet we need only throw a very cursory glance around, to see how little all these boasted stores of human intellect can advance the purposes, for which they are collected, and secure their professed object, the happiness of man. The wisdom of God, on the other hand, has received no addition to its greatness from all eternity by exercise; (just as the shining of the sun has added nothing to its light, since the creation of the world:) but it is, and ever will remain, infinitely sufficient to devise, with infallible certainty, the means of accomplishing all the purposes of his will, and all the as-

surances of His grace. The heirs of promise cannot indeed discover the methods whereby it operates; for God's counsels are a great deep: but they should rest contented, in knowing that although clouds and darkness may be about his throne, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat. When St. Paul exclaimed, "*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and goodness of God: how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*"¹ he was not the less disposed to rest his soul upon them, or rather upon the Saviour, who made them manifest to his faith, than if they had lain upon the surface of God's every day procedure towards himself, and the Church; and were as intelligible to him as the intentions of his own mind.

We have indeed no warrant to suppose that a view of God so clear and far-discerning, as to comprehend the fulness of these truths, was yet vouchsafed to Abram. The communication however, must have been made with sufficient plainness, to shew him God as his Friend and Helper; and to bestow upon him such apprehensions of divine goodness and love, as should

¹ Rom. xi. 33.

secure obedience, amidst all the trials whereby it might be attended. Those communications were enlarged by subsequent fellowship. His eye was thus strengthened to look with more understanding, at each new communication of grace, into those depths of goodness, faithfulness, power, and love, which are opened to the believer in Christ Jesus. "We shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord." If any man will do his will, he shall learn it more fully : and "*beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*"¹ Our imperfect acquaintance with God in his gospel, is no ground of discouragement, if we are faithful to the light vouchsafed us. If He hath called us by the effectual power of his grace, and made us willing to obey ; our path of knowledge, peace, holiness, and joy, will resemble the shining light, which shineth more and more, unto the perfect day. If God hath so far revealed Himself to us, as our portion for eternal Salvation by Jesus Christ, that his love is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost given to us, it will

enkindle our own ; and as our love is enlarged, our light will be increased.

(II.) We have now to consider, **THE NATURE OF THESE PROMISES.**

The engagements of God are vouchsafed to men under the Gospel, in order to answer the same end, as deeds and evidences among men in their dealings with each other. When the soul is made fast to God, by the anchor of its peace, sure and steadfast, which entereth into that within the vail, the promises of the gospel, float like the buoy upon the surface of the waters, to direct the Christian, as in a moment, to the anchorage in which he hopes and trusts. They form a beaming constellation in those worlds of light, where his heart should continually dwell. It was even so with those promises vouchsafed to the eye of Abram's faith ; guiding him onwards in hope and patience from Mesopotamia to Canaan. He was a Chaldee, and therefore probably an astronomer : but the material heaven with which he was familiar, could exhibit no object of contemplation so cheering, no pilot of his way so certain and infallible, as the guidance of God's sure promises, shining in the brightness of present hope within his heart, and soon to beam upon him in

the yet greater radiance of God's covenant love, secured and consummated to him for evermore.

If however we desire better to see and understand something of the beauty of this spiritual constellation, we must look upon it more narrowly, and examine for a few minutes the individual stars of which it is composed. They appear indeed at the first to be mainly temporal, and had a certain measure of accomplishment in their letter,—but they had a spiritual reference which Abram understood: because his faith looked beyond the surface, and saw redeeming blessings richly treasured up behind them. And here is the blessedness of such as are one with faithful Abram, in Christ Jesus. They understand and realize providential promises; but they rest not there; for that rest would be polluted with all the alloy of earthliness, in the elements of change and termination. They regard them therefore as refreshments by the way, in order that they may more comfortably attain the end.

(1.) The first promise exhibits a remarkable instance of the tenderness, wherewith God suits his communications to the wants and circumstances of his creatures. Abram was childless; and the Lord said, “*I will make of thee a*

great nation." Yet here was an engagement exceedingly contrary to the suggestions of earthly sense and reason. His heart could have been hardly warmed by it, before its improbability must have struck him, if he listened only to flesh and blood. He was childless; how then should he be the father of a great nation? And how was his political advancement to be expected, if he left that land where he might have influence and power, to go as an exile and a stranger into another? The promise was, notwithstanding, exactly fulfilled, in the posterity of Hagar.¹ It was made good, according to the more particular purpose of the Most High, when Balak complained that the sons of Jacob covered the face of the earth;² and in the prosperity of the Jewish people within the land of Canaan.³ But it has its highest and most especial accomplishment, in that spiritual posterity which forms one redeemed, sanctified Church, gathered out of all nations, and kindreds, and tongues, and people, under the dominion of the Lamb of God; proving Abram, as the father of all them that believe, to be truly the head of a great and

¹ Gen. xvi. 10. xvii. 20.

² Numb. xxi. 11.

³ Luther in Genesis xii.

illustrious nation. He had indeed great need of patience, to await the acting out of these engagements, on the part of God. Edom, the posterity of Esau, had grown up into a kingdom, before the sons of Jacob had where to set their foot in Canaan. The motion of this promise resembled that of a slow-paced planet, hardly visible to the naked eye: but when the time of the promise drew near, which God had sworn to Abram, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.¹ Even so, must the believer await the fitting time of the Father's wisdom, which He hath kept in his own power, acting upon the persuasion, that in due season, the harvest of faith shall come, and the ingathering be great.

(2.) But, as if the high distinction already promised, and those yet to follow, needed something which might knit them together, and supply every joint of the whole system; God declares in the second member of the promise, *I will bless thee*. No doubt this glad communication embraced all the support, which Abram needed on his journey, all the provisions, whereby he must be fed, all the protection

¹ Acts vii. 17. Spurstowe on the Promises, p. 87.

which the Most High would spread around him, as a shield ; and all the other manifestations of providential goodness, personal and relative towards him. But to confine it within these limits, would be to look upon the word of God with less insight into its meaning, than Abram had, even in this early twilight of his spiritual day. He had, personally, no share in the land of Canaan. The blessing therefore, must necessarily have extended itself to spiritual and eternal mercies, whereof Abram's understanding would be enlarged, as new communications were made to him ; to show that the promise could only be fulfilled in pardon, adoption, sanctification, perseverance in the faith, and a crown of life. No man was ever yet brought to forsake the idols among which his soul dwelt, by any promises of merely present good, which painful experience would often appear to contradict. A spiritual meaning must be the key that opens all the wards of the mind of God, and shows the mercies treasured up in it for his children. Then, and then only, as such gracious purport is apprehended, will they be prepared to follow ; as He may point the way ; and turn from idols to serve the true and living God, in the gospel of his Son.

(3.) Again, it was declared to Abram, *I will make thy name great.* Amply has that promise been fulfilled, both in Ishmael and Isaac. The friend of God, had indeed some little renown as a conqueror; but none as a lawgiver, or inventor of useful arts. He was no philosopher, but a plain man dwelling in tents; yet no name, no memory is more renowned than his, throughout Christendom, and even among those who serve the false prophet in the eastern world.¹ This however, is not the highest ground, on which the greatness of Abram's name must stand. His record is not chiefly that of worldly honour, and ecclesiastical privilege. It is especially written in the spiritual history of the Church, whereof he is the high father, and in the blessings of those who glory in him, as the head and representative of the heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. All distinctions, except those arising from adoption into the family of God, are written in the dust, and the grave will cover them. And He, who gives every privilege according to his own grace, and the Father's love in Him, has taught us how to make the estimate—" *In this rejoice not, that the devils are*

¹ Foster's Mahometanism Unveiled.

*made subject unto you; but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*¹

(4.) Another promise follows,—disjointed indeed from one of its predecessors in the divine communication made to Abram, but inseparably united with it, in the mind of God. "*I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing.*" How far the promise was accomplished, we can only dimly trace, in the persuasion, that thousands have profited by the faith, devotedness, and holy walk of this man of God, through the whole round of his duties, and to the end of his life, as their high example. His instruction has given light: his conduct has embodied the precepts of God to many; while it was the peculiar grace and loftiness of his distinction, to be the world's emphatic blessing, as the forefather of its Saviour.

Is this delightful promise then confined to Abram—or doth it not extend to all that holy family, whereof he is the earthly head? Every Christian hath an interest in it, as a distinguished portion of his spiritual birthright. Abram lives not for himself. He is set up as a witness for God, and as an instrument for good

¹ Luke ix. 20.

to the Church and to the world. Every spiritual mercy therefore, whereby he is enriched; every communication of his Father's bounty in the everlasting covenant; every grace of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon him, unto sanctification; every sure promise made over to him, hath a reference beyond himself. When God eminently blesses any of his servants, he gives not to them alone, but that they may become the providential channels of carrying forth those blessings to others. These holy influences descending upon any eminent saint and servant of the Most High, pass onwards to others for their good; "*like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments.*"¹ Its holy influence is as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descendeth upon the mountains of Zion, not to rest upon the hill top near to heaven, but to pass downwards and be poured upon the little vallies beneath it. And what a world would this become—how beautiful would it be in holiness, how rich in the fruits of righteousness, how sweetly harmonious in every note of

¹ Psalm cxxxiii. 2.

its compass, to sound the glories of redemption, were every believer anxious that from the opened windows of heaven, spiritual blessings should be poured upon him, till there was not room to receive them; not merely for his individual prosperity, peace, holiness, and joy; but that God in all things might be magnified by Jesus Christ, in the extension of his kingdom over the hearts of others. A Sovereign blessed of God, would be a blessing to his subjects. They who bear rule under him, would spread the honour of the Most High in the administration of their office. The ministers of the sanctuary,—their hearts filled with the love, and their lips touched with the spirit of God,—men of prayer, wrestling for their Lord's presence and unction on their labours, would make many sympathize with them, and largely promote the honour of their Lord. Parents, enriched by the unspeakably precious blessing of an indwelling Saviour, would have their pleadings largely answered for their children; and their households would be families of heaven. Masters would have their domestics obeying them in the duties of every day, "*not with eye service as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from*

*the heart."*¹ The green-spots in the wilderness, thus watered by many streams from the river of life, would multiply and approach each other, until they covered it with one bright livery of holiness and love; making it blossom like Eden the garden of God.

Oh, what joyous encouragement is here to any and every faithful disciple of the Redeemer! "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing." Hath unchangeable truth fulfilled the former part of the promise to any of you? Then who shall separate it from the latter? If God hath commissioned it to be fruitful, beyond the immediate object of its bestowment, who shall make it barren? Look still upwards for all covenanted blessings from Him, with whom they dwell. Look around for the means of instrumentally distributing them, by influence, example, instruction, prayer; and you who thus long to magnify the Lord, will assuredly know, either here, or in the disclosures of a coming day, that you have not walked your heaven-ward way alone. You will not come unattended to the resurrection of the saints, *when they that be wise shall shine as the bright-*

¹ Eph. vi. 1.

*ness of the firmament ; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.*¹

(5) And, as if these distinctions did not suffice for the man whom God delighted to honour, we find Jehovah making as it were a league offensive and defensive with Abram his friend. *I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.* This is language never used, but of one especially favoured by the Most High. It declares, not only that he should be blessed himself, but that all others should be blessed or cursed, as they respected or injured him. Of this amazing condescension towards him, the histories of Abimelech, Laban, Potiphar, both the Pharaohs, and especially Balak and Balaam, furnish remarkable examples: “*I wot,*” said the idolatrous enemy of the sons of Abram, “*that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.*” “*How shall I curse*” (said the wretched seer, when his heart vainly longed to call down defeat and ruin upon Israel) “*how shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?*”²

(6.) I pass however to the climax of the

¹ Dan. xii. 3.

² Fuller on Genesis Vol. i. p. 152.

³ Numb. xxiii. 8.

whole gracious declaration of Jehovah to his servant: because a spiritual meaning of the last promise is involved in it. “*In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*” In these few words, the germ of the covenant of salvation is brought before the eye of the Church, as it was exhibited to the apprehension of its earthly representative: and he must have reasoned on this wise, concerning the amazing communication thus vouchsafed to him. “If all families of the earth are to be blessed in me, the mercy cannot have its existence vested in myself personally, for I shall not live to behold it. This mysterious good and benediction, must arise therefore from one who shall be born of me; who, himself eminently distinguished of God, shall bring with him a blessedness, of which the length and breadth shall embrace the whole earth. He must therefore, be not man merely, but God also; though he must assume human nature, in order to be born as my descendant.” Thus, did a divine communication, involve in a few simple words, that mystery of an incarnate Saviour, which holy patriarchs and prophets more largely and clearly explained, for the faith and hope of his waiting Church.¹

¹ Luther in Genesis, Cap. xii.

The world, liberated from the yoke of Satan, death and hell destroyed, the law fulfilled, and its curse removed, sin forgiven, eternal salvation provided, and the kingdom of heaven opened unto all believers, were among the mercies comprised in this promise. They broke upon Abram's mind, as the dawnings of that day of Christ, which he saw perhaps even now dimly in spirit, though not in flesh, and whereof he was glad, as a believer, though yet an infant in the life of faith. All the posterities of Adam were cursed in him; and God here promises that they should be blessed in the seed of Abram, and by him, in the seed of the woman.

Now this blessing must extend to, and embrace all the good whereof men are deprived by the curse, or it cannot establish its claim and assumption. Its declaration was delayed from the promise in Eden, to that in Ur; because the Most High intended to leave mankind to walk, for a long and dark period in their own way; that thus He might exhibit his severity against sin; that thus He might display the sovereignty and freeness of that mercy, through which He had provided and promised a Deliverer; and that thus He might make

trial of the wisdom of man, in seeking out for the person of the Redeemer, and the nature of the freedom which He would confer. In this most precious promise therefore, was that gold deposited, in the keeping of the Church, which after many generations was brought forth, and stamped with the image of God.

The curse pronounced upon Satan in paradise is here renewed. "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse *him* that curseth thee." The blessing is to many, the curse refers to one, the apostate angel and god of this world, who brought sin and shame and ruin upon it.¹ This gracious promise was again and again renewed: for Infinite Love and Wisdom knew it to be the foundation, on which faith must rest through many ages, to elapse before the advent of Christ. Thus was the gospel preached to Abram; "*that the blessing of Abram might come upon the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ: that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*" Through this declaration does every believer trace up, as it were, the ancestry and lineage of his spiritual mercies, in the Lamb of God; because it connects the

¹ Owen on the Hebrews, Vol. I. p. 175.

person, nature, and offices of the Incarnate Word, with the first hope and ray of salvation, that burst through the darkness of man's fallen soul in Eden, and took away that load of sin, which, if it had remained upon him, would have eternally overwhelmed and destroyed him. Sweetly then, as every message of a Saviour's love should strike upon our ears, a peculiar delight should be felt, by those who have experienced the power of redeeming love, in this promise to Abram, which not only gives an assurance of pardon and peace to the world, but vests it in an individual and his posterity, for safe keeping, until the coming of Him of whom the patriarch was a type and shadow. *"Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, hath sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."*¹

A Bible, a Gospel, and a Saviour, are the blessings thus given to Abram, and left by him as a rich legacy to the church and the world.

1. Are such promises as these precious when apprehended by the heart of a believer? *Then should they be diligently pleaded before God in prayer.* If we would enjoy them in their

¹ Acts iii. 26.

excellence, and find them making us conformed to his image, who is the sum and substance of them all, we must seek to have them fastened upon our hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit. Our thoughts indeed are so little proportioned to the majesty and goodness of God, that when we would ask for needed blessings we are often discouraged in prayer; like Moses, when Jehovah had promised quails for all the multitude of Israel: as though it were impossible that God should do as He had said. And therefore, because we fear to ask, we fail to obtain. When meditation upon the promises has filled a Christian's heart with a full sense of the value of evangelical blessings, in the glorified treasure-house of the church, prayer should pour out the desire to possess them; and God will be found with an open hand to bestow them. The promises, so pleaded and sought from God, will be blessed in their own high value, and blessed to the receiver as answers, to prayer, and evidences of the love of Christ.

II. *A Christian should never rest contented in a slight acquaintance with the promises.* They are intended, in the purposes of divine wisdom, to smooth the path of self-denial—to console the child of God in the afflictions and

trials of nature and grace—to enable the good soldier of Jesus Christ to endure hardness in his gracious warfare—to lift his renewed mind above the love of this present world—to bear it up over the floods of temptation—to produce conformity with Christ, in his death to sin, and in his reign over sin—and to enable him to perfect holiness in the fear of God. And shall it then be, that one who feels his need of fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, for these important ends, and for that peace of God which passeth all understanding, should be satisfied, without ample and constant experience of their presence and power within his heart? God forbid! O never may it suffice those who have embraced these promises in their Redeemer, only to dip the end of the rod of faith in this honey, and put it to their mouth, and so pass on, and be little strengthened. He who would sound the depths of the sea, must not stand upon the shore, and let down his plummet. He must sail far upon its bosom, and then try whether its bottom may be reached at all. It is thus with the promises. He who would understand the love and greatness of his Saviour and covenant Father in them, must follow them out, in the life of an experimental religion. He must

familiarize himself with them, as they meet his view; and endeavour, through a daily increasing acquaintance with them, to "*know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and to be filled with all the fulness of God.*"¹

III. Is it the end of all the exceeding great and precious promises given to Abram, and his seed by faith, that they should be made partakers of the divine nature? Then is it an all-important question for a believer to ask, *Whether he is so enjoying the happiness they communicate, and using them according to the purpose of the Spirit, as to be escaping the corruptions that are in the world through lust, and purifying himself, even as God is pure?* "Having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."² He who neglects this solemn call, can never abound in the riches, either of grace or consolation. The promises, truly received into the heart, and faithfully dealt by, are not only *causes* of holiness, as workmen of the Spirit, but *arguments* to enforce it: and ill indeed shall we understand, either their nature, or their

¹ Ephes. iii. 9.

² 2 Cor. vii. 1.

value, if we fail to exemplify the life of faith upon them. They are pure in themselves, even as gold purified seven times in the fire; and where they are truly received, and enjoyed, according to the will of God, must effect, (notwithstanding all the opposing power of sin and Satan) a gracious conformity to themselves, and to the fountain of immaculate holiness, from whence they flow, to supply the church. They not only declare, but communicate the riches of the grace of God to his children in Christ Jesus; and they prepare his blessed family, day by day, for the enjoyment of his rest, and the vision of his glory.

SERMON V.

THE COMMAND OBEYED.

GENESIS XII. 4, 5.

SO ABRAM DEPARTED, AS THE LORD HAD SPOKEN UNTO HIM ;
AND LOT WENT WITH HIM. AND ABRAM WAS SEVENTY
AND FIVE YEARS OLD WHEN HE DEPARTED OUT OF HARAN.
AND ABRAM TOOK SARAI HIS WIFE, AND LOT HIS BROTHER'S
SON, AND ALL THEIR SUBSTANCE THAT THEY HAD GATHERED,
AND THE SOULS THAT THEY HAD GOTTEN IN HARAN : AND
THEY WENT FORTH TO GO INTO THE LAND OF CANAAN ; AND
INTO THE LAND OF CANAAN THEY CAME.

He who should stand at the source of one of those mighty rivers in the new world, which traverses a thousand leagues of country, and then pours a sea of water into the ocean, would never imagine, unless he had traced it upwards, that it could be the parent of such a stream. And it is even so in the processes of divine wisdom in the spiritual world. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, to the eye of sense. Some of those events connected with

the great economy of redemption, which have been most astonishing in their progress, and which are hastening onwards, to a completion unspeakably and everlastingly glorious, have had their rise in great obscurity, and passed almost unnoticed through their earliest development. "Indeed, the brevity of the Mosaic record down to the call of Abram, has often excited surprize. Doubtless, events of great variety and interest, occurred in the collisions, corruptions, and restorations of the earlier world. But the reason of this brevity, may have been the preservation of the *outline*; which alone was important to identify the plan of Providence, throughout the ages to come. If all the *details* had been given, that outline might have been difficult to trace. But now, we have the map, with the great features marked upon it, to the exclusion of all the minor prominences. We have the form, undisguised by the various changes and involutions of the robe. Yet this but the more distinctly vindicates the *inspiration* of the Pentateuch. What *human* dexterity could thus anticipate the fates, and thus administer to the wisdom of the future?"¹

¹ Dr. Croly's Three Cycles of Revelation, pp. 305, 306.

When Noah, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, the mockers, and loiterers around him, little dreamed of that destroying flood, which was soon to be poured upon them; nor of the fortunes of that future Church and world, whereby the coming ruin would be succeeded. When the command and promise of the Most High came unto Abram, it was probably unknown beyond the little circle of his own family. And when he girded up his loins, and took his staff in his hand, to obey it, by removing from Ur, the Chaldeans would no doubt witness his departure with few emotions, save those of wonder at his folly. Yet was this event, the first visible link in that amazing chain of providences, whereby God was about to bind together all the fortunes of his Church in one beautiful harmony—whereby that Church, separated from the world, as God's peculiar people, was to be plainly united to Himself, for its own good, and his supreme glory in its salvation. When Abram went forth from his country, a childless wanderer, it never entered the mind of any of his neighbours, that he would become a great nation; less still, if possible, that in his seed should all families of the earth be blessed; that through him the church

should have light and life eternal, when the Son of God should become in his posterity the Son of man. We stand now at the source and fountain of the patriarch's history. We have our hand upon the connecting link between the Patriarchal and Levitical Dispensations. We have hitherto, merely looked upon the surface of those depths of unsearchable grace and goodness, which Abram's calling of God contains. It will be our first step down the stream of those wonders which make known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God in Abram's history, to consider—

**THE OBEDIENCE PAID BY HIM TO THE
DIVINE COMMAND.**

If his mind could have been influenced by those ordinary considerations, which sense and sight would suggest to one so circumstanced, all would have pleaded against the divine command; all would have united to say, "This be far from thee: this shall not happen unto thee." But when the power of Jehovah attended his own revelation, every hindrance was subdued.

(I.) THIS OBEDIENCE is exhibited, as PROMPT, UNHESITATING, AND IMMEDIATE. The friends among whom Abram had long

dwelt; the Society, with which his heart and affections were conversant; the temporal good, that had grown up around him; the pursuits of his life; the habits of his mind; and, as I have already said, the idols of his worship, were all to be abandoned. The way before him, was dark and unpromising. Nay, it does not appear that his Heavenly Master had given him any distinct view of Canaan itself, the place where he was to dwell, until he had actually reached it. It was just simply said, "Go into a land which I will shew thee:" and only when he arrived in the plain of Moreh did God condescend to say—"Unto thy seed (not to thyself, but to thy seed) will I give this land."¹ The mention of Canaan in the close of the eleventh chapter, is generally admitted to have been by anticipation. The mind of Saul could suggest no considerations but those of selfishness to secure the fidelity of his followers, or to impeach their wisdom in concealing Jonathan's covenant with David, "*Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the Son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, that all of you*

¹ Gen. xii. 7.

*have conspired against me ; and there is none that sheweth me that my son hath made a league with the Son of Jesse ? ”*¹ No more could the natural mind of Abram have looked beyond himself, and the personal and family good or evil, which might have promised or threatened, to attend his removal. But while man would refuse obedience at all, or linger, to calculate and count the cost of following Jesus, in the way of salvation, the Almightyness of his Grace puts forth its hand to the work, and the conquest is complete. “ *His people are made willing in the day of his power.* ”² Thus it is in the heart’s affections, when they go forth to meet and do his will. The mind is enlightened to know the state and danger of every unrenewed transgressor, in the land of its idolatry. A spirit of love, and a liberty of the will, arise from the persuasion of divine goodness, wrought upon the soul. The exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel are received in faith : and then, even as our great Redeemer Himself, “ *for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame,* ” so doth his disciple go forth to his own appointed

¹ 1 Sam. xxii. 7, 8.

² Psalm cx. 3.

labour and conflict, with the animating hope of the inheritance made over to the saints in light, by the unchangeable faithfulness of their covenant God. His beauty, and the liberty of his service then begin to be understood. That service is known to be perfect freedom: and the more close the soul's communion with its Saviour, the more clearly will his glory, and the true happiness of his service, be discovered; and the more purely will love reign over the mind, to impel its obedience. "*As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God!*"¹

It was even thus with St. Paul, when the riches of the love of Christ, brought him forth into that mighty change whereby he became the ministerial glory of the Church, which he had so fiercely persecuted. "*When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.*"² When the secret, but Omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit, had made an internal discovery of that Son, as God's salvation, and

¹ Psalm xlii. 1.

² Gal. i. 15, 16.

of his own personal interest in the great redemption, the inwrought change was total; and thenceforth it was Christ to him to live. This is the high, the mysterious, the energetic principle of a believer's life. The love of Christ constrains him: and all the hindrances of the world, the flesh, and the devil, are bidden to get behind him. No influence, short of this moving power from heaven; no motives, less powerful than those which are called into exercise, when Christ is thus formed in the soul, the hope of glory, can subdue its earthliness, and carry it above all temptations, whereby it may be solicited to remain in idolatry and sin. Carnal reasons, counsels, friends, arguments, solicitations, ease, and interest, may plead long and loudly: but their claim will not be admitted. Motives may be urged, as painful to oppose, as would be the plucking out of a right eye, or the excision of a right hand. But when the person of the Saviour, the nature of his service, and the price of his salvation are understood and received, as the revelations of his grace impress them upon the heart, He will gain Himself the victory over its affections.

And when a divine command, with all its promises, and all its privileges in the gospel of

redeeming grace is made known, immediate obedience is the only wisdom. Hesitation is equally guilty and dangerous. "O not so, my Lord," should be far from those, whom the God of grace hath visited with salvation in his Son. Flesh and blood are subtle counsellors; and they have a powerful advocate in the heart's deceitfulness. They are totally unfitted to advise us in spiritual duties: for "the carnal mind is enmity against God." If they cannot hinder obedience entirely, they will gladly deform it, and represent it as the Christian's slavery, rather than his joy and liberty. They will endeavour to turn the mind from choosing the word of God, as the only rule, and the Holy Ghost, as the only Guide; and to transfer all confidence from both to the darkness and delusions of that wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God. They will endeavour to subdue the life of faith, to the life of sense; and to make the professor of Christianity, when summoned to go forth from his unholy rest, resist the call, and cry, "This is a hard saying, who can bear it?"

"If God then, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in any heart, to give the light of the knowledge of his own

glory in the face of Jesus Christ:"¹ and if that heart's approbation hath by faith welcomed the disclosure, as the dearest blessing which a lost creature could experience, or the Most High God communicate, out of the stores of his incomprehensible mercy, when the command to forsake all and follow Christ is given to such a believer, what should be his delighted answer, as he rises in God's strength and his soul's gladness, to make the sacrifice? "*What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*"² "I will make haste and delay not, to keep thy commandments." When God restores Ephraim, the first spiritual breath should be employed in crying, "*What have I to do any more with idols?*"³ If any of you have learned to say, "God forbid that I should glory save only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;" it becomes you to make known, that you have been the Apostle's follower in that happy experience of his conformity to Jesus—"Whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Nothing can be so effectual

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 6.² Phil. iii. 7, 8.³ Hosea xiv. 8.

as the revelation of a crucified Saviour, made within the heart, to wean it from sin, and to unite its affections in love to the way of a reconciled God.

(II.) Abram's obedience to the divine command, exhibited a feature quite inseparable from the character of a true believer—I mean HIS DEEP SOLICITUDE FOR THE TRUE WELFARE OF THOSE, TO WHOM HE STOOD RELATED IN FAMILY BONDS AND CONNEXIONS. “*He took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran: and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan.*” The servants whom he had bought, they who were born in his house, and they also it would appear, whom he had indeed spiritually gotten, as instrumentally the cause of their conversion, to that faith which wrought so actively within his own heart, were brought out with him. He spared them not a portion in his own trials, through a false and fatal tenderness: but led them forth towards the blessedness of that country, which gleamed so brightly in his own eye and heart of faith.

The promise of the Father, made unto his Son in the sure and everlasting covenant of grace,

declared that He should see his seed, the travail of his soul, in sinners redeemed and restored to God. Therefore did He not only die for them, the just for the unjust, as their atonement and ransom—therefore did He not only give them the merit of his righteousness, as their unchallengeable title to eternal life, when they truly believe; but He goes to seek and to save that which was lost. He waits, in his unrivalled patience, at the door of hearts, closed by unbelief, locked by all the stratagems of Satan, barred by self-will, and guarded by the strong man armed, until his Holy Spirit doth the work of his love, opens Him an entrance, and leads the affections forth to follow Him, by the light and impulse of his own love.

And when a Christian is himself awakened to find, that by the blood of the covenant, God hath brought him out of the horrible pit of his alienation, from the family of heaven, and set him in the way of life, and promised him guidance thither, and glory as its consummation, will he not put forth his hand, in the very act of rising to follow Christ, towards others, that they also may be one with him? Will not his heart melt over the miseries of those, with whom the arrangements of providence have connected

him in the relations and dearest characters of life, to pluck them also as brands out of the burning: and to say, "Come with us, who go forth with Jesus, and we will do you good?" When Moses was commanded to lead Israel from the bondage of Egypt, it did not content him to have the multitude of God's host delivered. He would have even the sheep and oxen of the people included in the freedom to be wrung from the unwilling hand of Pharaoh. "*There shall not a hoof be left behind.*" And did it satisfy the father of the faithful to lead forth Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and to leave all the rest of his household within the forbidden verge of the idolatries of Chaldea? Assuredly not. Although he had not yet been blessed with children, there were others beside his wife, over whom a charge had been given him—a charge of weighty and solemn responsibility, to bring them forth. He had servants, and he laboured to win them. He had souls in his household, spiritually given to him, as he declared the counsel of God to them, and as a blessing rested upon his endeavours to make them companions of his way. Authority was added to precept and example; and all his family took their pilgrimage with him towards

the land of promise, as the light of promise led them thither.

And who shall tell how greatly the example of Sarai's obedience to Abram's will must have influenced those around her? She appears to have offered no resistance to the divine command; to have pleaded no bar against her husband's prompt obedience: she was therefore blessed in her deed. And when the two great centres of influence, around which all family movements mainly revolve, coincide in harmony of mind to the will of God, and the love of Christ, and the delight of his way, the course of those inferior movements, (if I may so speak, which constitute the family system, may hopefully be expected to illustrate the power and beauty of family religion. When a believing husband and wife, walk as heirs together of the grace of life, their example will not be barren of imitation; for God's blessing will attend it. Never then, confine your spiritual solitudes for others, to the closest and dearest relations of life. Bring the love of Jesus to bear upon your hearts, and expand them, until they embrace all within the sphere of your influence, and lead them, with yourselves, to the fold and pasture of the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. A

great father of the Christian church ¹ observed, that the devil prevailed to make the heathen wicked, with no common success, but rather with especial power, by those fictions, which attributed all the sins that defile the world, not to men, originally, but to the deities, in whom they were called to believe: so that the foulest sin was sanctioned by the highest example. How carefully should the heads of families apply this truth to themselves. Let not the inferiors around you, think themselves safe and warranted in unbelief and sin, because they can plead you as their pattern. God hath set you as stars in the firmament, by which others may guide their course. And if while they look to you, and follow, as you may direct, they fall into iniquity, rebellion against God, rejection of Christ, slavery to the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life, and thus into the death eternal, will that God and Governor who placed them under your care, hold you guiltless for misleadings so dreadful?

If, on the other hand, they who “*convert a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of*

¹ St. Augustine's Confessions.

sins,"¹ that radiance will suffer no eclipse, because they for whom you laboured, watched, prayed, poured forth such instruction, as had made yourselves wise unto salvation, and provided such examples as became the disciples of the Lord, lived within the walls and doors of your own habitations, or within the dearer dwellings of your own converted and gracious hearts. Families would become holy, were the heads of families renewed by the Spirit of God, and anxious for their households. And thus, nations themselves would become mountains of holiness, and seats for the throne of God where He would be glorified. None indeed can enkindle the life of God within the soul, save "He who hath his fire in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem." But the instruments I have mentioned are of divine appointment; and were they well employed, casting themselves upon the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, their labour of love would not be in vain.

(III.) THE OBEDIENCE OF ABRAM, MANIFESTED AN ENTIRE SURRENDER OF HIMSELF TO THE DIVINE GUIDANCE. "He went out not knowing whither he went." It is common

¹ James v. 20.

in the naval warfare and enterprizes of nations, to send a ship or a fleet with sealed orders for ulterior operations. These instructions are not to be opened by the commander, until he shall have reached a certain latitude and longitude, of which he is previously apprized. He may speculate upon the order, but he presses towards the mark, where further light and knowledge will be communicated; and he does well. It was thus with Abram. He knew little—nay he knew nothing of the promised land; probably not even of the way to it: yet he went onward, and desired no halting place, until God Himself should make the discovery. Now this is God's requirement from faith and it is the high exercise of faith to obey the command. When our Lord stoops to wash the disciples' feet, Peter is amazed at the condescension of his glorious Lord, and would oppose his purpose. "*Thou shalt never wash my feet.*" But the Lord promises future light to clear the mystery. "*What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*"¹ The Lord declares the absolute necessity of that spiritual law, which his gracious act typified. "*If I wash thee not,*

¹ John xiii. 6, 7.

thou hast no part in me." Immediately the whole Apostle's mind is bowed down to entire submission—" *Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head !*" It is a consideration, to still all fears, and hush all doubts within a believer's heart, while he goes on a darkling way of present providence, that God's own hand is leading him : and that, though it doth not yet appear what he shall be, he knows that he shall be like his Saviour, for he shall see Him as He is, at the end of his pilgrimage.

Abram's resting place was promised, but not revealed. He had no cloudy pillar to lead him ; no angel of the covenant, to go, as it were, before him, in visible majesty ; and to hold a manifest shield of protection over him : yet he cast himself in faith upon the divine conduct ; and went forth unhesitatingly ; not knowing whither he went. That same God, who raised the righteous man from the East, called him also to his foot ; made him willing to follow the law and way of his appointed course, and to cast all the care of the pilgrimage, where it would be surely and safely borne. And this is the legitimate exercise of faith ;—not to dispute ; but to obey. When God, in the mysteries of his dealing " leads the blind by a way that they know not ;"

it never becomes them to say, "We will not follow, until our eyes shall be opened, and we ourselves assured of the fitness of our journey:". for thus would man contend with God, and be wiser than his Maker. Thus would the blind eye think it saw better than the God who formed it: and the deaf ear, that it heard more distinctly than He who made it capable of receiving sound. If patience hath its perfect work—if the Christian lose not his confidence in God, nor fall into unbelief, his feet will not stumble on the dark mountains of any providential trial. The promise will be his light, while the providence may lower around him. It should be enough for faith to lean upon the Saviour's breast in love, while preparing to follow Him; without desiring to know the counsels of his heart, until his wisdom sees the fitting time for disclosing them. If infinite love has appointed the end of every Christian's course, to be with the Redeemer in his realm and glory; and if infinite wisdom has devised the sure means of attaining it, then faith may be well contented, simply to ask the question, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?"—to place body, soul, and spirit, with all their movements, hopes, and solitudes, at the disposal of an

unerring God, and to say, "*Behold the servant of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word.*" While faith, like the draughtsman's compass, hath one foot fixed in God, as its immoveable centre, the other limb may be safely permitted to go round at its appointed distance, and the circle will be at last complete. "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things will be added unto you.*" The Lord may constrain his disciples to go into the ship; the wind may be contrary; and they may be for a while buffeted with the storm. But He will come to them, in his own good time, though He walk in much gloom upon the sea to approach them; and they will reach the land in safety, peace, and joy.

(I.) *I may be addressing some, who like Abram, when the God of glory appeared to him, are dwelling contented in a land of idolatry and sin.* Surely a message of life and mercy, hath been vouchsafed to you. An offended and neglected God has not allowed you to remain ignorant of your state, your duties, and your hopes, unless the curtain of that ignorance be drawn by your own resolved hand around you. If you are idling away the hours of life and salvation, amidst the frivolities of the world's

pleasures, or the vain nothingness of its more serious pursuits, you cannot plead that no man hath hired you. The gospel hath been preached unto you. The ambassadors of Christ have besought you. A voice hath come again, and again, from the well-head of mercy in the great salvation of the Son of God, crying, "*Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!*"¹ "*Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die?*"² Pardon, which lost angels need, but shall never have, hath been offered to you. Blood of atonement, which, touching their fetters of righteous judgment, would have made them free as the sons of God, but of which they must never know the efficacy, hath been poured forth by the Saviour for human sinners. God who passed those angels by, and left them in despair, hath taken your nature, to deliver it. And lo, He calls you to be happy. He knows that you cannot be happy, as unbelievers and idolators; and such are all the world's votaries, and all the slaves of that reason in divine things, which scorns what it cannot comprehend, and will be wiser than the Most High Himself, in proposing a scheme of salvation for mankind.

¹ Isaiah lv. 1.² Ez. xxxiii. 11.

While thus remaining in your dark infidelity, you are making light of God's own message of love. Arise, while yet the day of mercy shines around you. Get you out of the country of your idolatries, to serve the living God. Get you from your kindred, the children of this world, who are lying under the sentence of his curse. Get you from your father's house—the house of the god of this world, where you have no birthright, except that of wrath and condemnation; and betake yourselves unto that land, which the Holy Ghost waits to show you, in the length and breadth of its beauty. Take your part with the saints of God, whose portion is the all-sufficient Saviour; and be blessed with them, both in your pilgrimage and your rest.

II. *Are any sojourning in Haran, by the way, instead of pressing on towards Canaan?* Abram waited there five years; probably induced by the increasing infirmities of his father: and when the grave had closed over Terah, he needed a second message, before he struck his tent, to complete the remainder of his way, and to follow the bidding of his Lord. O believers in Jesus, whose fleetness in the Christian course hath been dishonourably slackened, you have much need to exercise strict vigilance and honest

dealing with yourselves; lest your dearest earthly duties become your hindrances. Let the dead bury their dead; but go ye and follow Jesus. You did run well, who hath hindered you? Redeem the time. Intreat God the Spirit to, plume again the wings of your failing faith; and to bear you above the earthliness which hath checked your heavenly flight, and made your souls cleave to the dust, "*Count not yourselves to have already attained, either to be already perfect.*"¹ Observe the activity of many before you; and the joy and peace wherewith they are blessed and strengthened. "*Arise ye and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted.*"² You have no abiding city, until after a finished course, and a good fight of faith, triumphantly finished, you shall be led within the borders of Immanuel's land. If God hath removed any dear friend, while you have been loitering in your spiritual race, should not the bereavement address you in the voice of his love, and with the solemnity of a merciful solicitation, for your recovery and restoration? Doth not that voice say to you, as it said to the prophet in Horeb, "What doest thou here?" And

¹ Phil. iii. 12.² Micah ii. 10.

have you a better answer than that of the prophet's timid and slothful withdrawal from his post of duty? If you love fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ—if you would be strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man—if you would grow in grace, and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour—if you would have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly into his everlasting kingdom, turn your faces Zionward at once; and arise to follow the call of God. And then, as the gales of Arabia send forth the fragrance of its spices, to refresh the traveller thitherward, and to strengthen him for his remaining journey, so will consolations from the land of blessedness refresh you, and enable you to go on your way rejoicing.

SERMON VI.

THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF FAITH.

HEBREWS XI. 8.

BY FAITH ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS CALLED TO GO OUT INTO A PLACE WHICH HE SHOULD AFTER RECEIVE FOR AN INHERITANCE, OBEYED, AND HE WENT OUT, NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT.

It is remarked by an eminent moral writer,¹ 'that whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses, whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future, predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings.' The assertion is unquestionably true; and when extended to embrace the relations which men bear to the invisible world, and to comprehend the laws of their spiritual being, together with their responsibilities Godward, as creatures under a gracious revelation of their

¹ Dr. Johnson.

Maker's will, it is their greatest safety, their best wisdom, and their highest honour, not to look to the things which are seen, which are temporal, as their dearest good, but to the things which are not seen, which are eternal. This is the life of faith,—the life of every Christian, renewed by the Spirit of God, and made one in mind and membership with his Saviour Jesus Christ. It is the life of wisdom, and blessedness, which St. Paul had realized, when he cried, "*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*"¹

This principle of faith was the mighty leverage whereby Abram was separated from all the natural and habitual attractions, that bound him to his country, his kindred, his father's house, and his father's idols. It was the impelling motive of all his future journies, and abidings; the staff whereon he leaned; and the wisely chosen guide of all his procedures. Such is the testimony given of him by the Apostle—such the good report made of him by

¹ Gal. ii. 20.

the Holy Ghost.¹ We have seen the first movement in his eventful pilgrimage towards Canaan. Before we accompany him on his progress, it seems desirable to examine this great power of faith, whereby he was carried through all duties, and raised, as on eagles' wings above temptations. And oh, that the same high and victorious grace may be vouchsafed to us, in our pilgrimage and warfare; making us more than conquerors, through Him who loved us; that we may be blessed with faithful Abraham!

I. Our inquiry must obviously commence with THE NATURE OF FAITH.

We shall vainly look to any other quarter for a description of this grace, (in the exercise of which the saints of the Most High have passed, are passing, and must pass, to the rest that remaineth for the people of God,) so clear and comprehensive as that given by the Apostle, (Heb. xi. 1.) “*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” It is the sure foundation, on which the soul rests in expectation of those things, towards which its hopes, its desires, and all its holy longings are

¹ Heb. xi. 8—19.

directed. It is that inwrought persuasion of the mind, whereby a present subsistence and being are given to those blessings, which God's own revelation hath promised, as the portion of his saints.¹ It is that refutation of atheistical doubts and arguments—that sure and certain persuasion of invisible realities, which is the heart's true, and (when it rises to the assurance of faith) the heart's untroubled rest. It is that spiritual sight, whereby Abraham saw the day of Christ, nineteen hundred years before it broke upon the earth, in the incarnation, and in which his soul rejoiced. It is the Holy Ghost's demonstration of those truths, which our senses cannot realize. Eternal life is promised to the dead in trespasses and sins. A blessed and glorious resurrection is declared to the children of God. But in the mean time their bodies must lie down in the corruption of the grave. The believer in Christ is pronounced perfectly righteous in his Father's sight; yet sin dwells within him. An unspeakable and eternal weight of glory is assured to him; and yet, he feels himself beset with sorrows. Faith then looks through the present cloud, and discerns

¹ Compare Rom. viii. 24, 25, with Heb. xi. 1.

God, in all his truth, and all his love behind it. It reckons therefore, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the bliss that shall be revealed in the holy members of the family of life, when they shall be finally and for ever "*translated from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*"¹

In examining this divine grace, the principle of all holy obedience, and, in its exercise, the clear light and faithful director of Abram's way ; I propose to consider it rather under its general character, as a simple affiance in the God of Truth, than with especial or exclusive reference to that justifying faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which, as its more peculiar office and benefit, makes every believer "the righteousness of God in Him." This more especial view of faith, wherein Abram was so largely blessed, both as an individual, and as the earthly federal head of God's believing church, will be the subject of a future examination. I am now therefore, not so immediately speaking of that faith which justifies the ungodly, by giving him an interest in the person and work of the Lamb

¹ Rom. viii. 21.

of God ; but rather of that faith, which is the great element of progress in the spiritual life. I speak of that faith which simply takes God at his word, whatever that word testifies or commands—which carried Abraham forward in hopeful expectation of deliverance and happiness, amidst all the pressures of present sufferings ; making him adventurous to act, and strong to endure ; even as his posterity cast themselves cheerfully into the depths of the Red Sea, and passed through them boldly, obeying the command ; because they looked for the promised deliverance of God. Faith then, thus considered, holds the light to hope ; and enables its happy possessor to see that glorious future, which is discernible by no other lamp. Faith cheers the Christian's onward way, by shewing him what stupendous realities of happiness are enfolded in the promises ; and most particularly, by directing him to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, with all its great salvation. It hangs upon his arm, as that impregnable shield from the armoury of God, whereby he is able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. When the Christian warrior takes that sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ; faith, to use the prophet's lofty

style,¹ "bathes it in heaven;" gives it a resistless edge and temper, by mingling the truth and faithfulness of God in his covenant, with all the exceeding great and precious promises; and by that individual application, which the Holy Spirit imparts, as the Teacher and Comforter of the Church.

Faith is not merely an assent of the understanding, clear perhaps, but cold and unfruitful; although knowledge is absolutely necessary to its very existence; since no man can believe that, of which he is ignorant; and since every man's belief will be usually in proportion to his acquaintance with the subject, on which it must be exercised. With what diligence, therefore, with what fervent aspirations of the soul for the illumination and teaching of the Holy Spirit, should all, who look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, search those Scriptures, which testify so fully and amazingly of Him; that thus they may become wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Him! "*He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*"² for the mere knowledge of his being, power, and holiness, will no more attract

¹ Isaiah xxxiv. 5.

² Heb. xi. 6.

a guilty rebel to Him, without some persuasion of his readiness to receive, to pardon, and to bless, than they would have drawn Adam to Him, when sin had poisoned, perverted, and destroyed, all the heavenward affections of his soul. Paul knew in whom he had believed; and therefore was persuaded, with a joy unspeakable and full of glory, that his covenant God in Christ Jesus was able to keep that which he had committed unto Him, against that day. No man, looking round, as he dreads the coming deluge of God's wrath against iniquity, can say in the transport of effectual faith, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul," until he hath been shewn the unsearchable mercies of God in Christ, as the ark of his refuge. Then he closes in very deed, to his present and eternal repose, with the invitation of his Lord, "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"¹ Every glorious attribute of God, seen in the face of Jesus Christ, then becomes a support, on which faith freely and boldly casts itself. But until each and every one is so known, they will appear like rocks and quicksands, ready to dash in pieces, and engulph every hope of a sin-convinced and

¹ Matt. xi. 28.

heart-stricken man. Faith, thus grounded in knowledge, works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world.

Perhaps it may be inquired, wherein consists the difference between Faith and Hope, two of that great triad of principles, which are said to abide in the church, (1 Cor. xiii. 13.) as they have their being and operation within the hearts of the family of heaven? These graces are indeed linked very closely together, but there is no confusion between them. Faith substantiates and realizes, evidences and demonstrates, those glorious objects, which lie so far beyond the reach and sphere of sense. It is constantly sent forth to forage in the invisible regions of the spiritual world, for the maintenance of this life. It brings thence the provisions, on which hope feeds, and whereby the heart is renewed and strengthened. Future blessedness is equally an object of faith and hope: of *faith*, as it is present in the promises of God, and the believer's heart; of *hope*, as it is yet to come. Faith is the ground of hope. Faith believes, and hope expects. Faith closes with the word of God, wherein the Christian's blessedness is assured; and hope is carried forth towards the subject of the promise. Faith

instates the Christian in the things promised, and persuades him of their truth; hope looks for the manifestation of them in possession. Faith is the hand, and hope the eye of the soul. Faith awakens hope, and then hope comes forth to repay the kindness, by supporting and cherishing faith.¹ Thus upheld, the early patriarchs, those men renowned in the annals of redemption, “*all died in faith, not having received the promises; but, having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them;*” and looked in hope to enjoy their substance and reality in Christ and in his salvation.

(1.) Faith, when called into vigorous exercise, is an *adventurous grace*, encouraging the spiritual merchantman to sell all that he hath, and buy the pearl of great price; inciting the spiritual miner to count all things but loss, that he may make the hidden treasure in the gospel field his own; persuading the lover of true riches to overlook or lightly regard all present possessions, compared with that “*inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.*”²

¹ Manton's Works, III. 3.

² 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

It is willing to cast itself wholly upon God, and to look to Him as its *all*, as well as its *own*. "*Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides Thee?*"¹

(2.) Faith is a *patient grace*. It can cleave to the promise, and hold there, without letting it go; though sometimes, perhaps, weary with its grasp. It can leave the time which God may choose for the accomplishment of his purposes of love, to his will. It can say to the soul concerning the intentions and undertakings of a faithful God, as Naomi said to Ruth, when her cause and happiness were at issue. "*Sit still, until thou know how the matter will fall; for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.*"² God will always do for his children exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think; even as Canaan was the literal promise to Abram; but endless life and blessedness, the reality that lay beneath the type. The father of the faithful was therefore well contented to allow Jehovah's wisdom to regulate the whole procedure; and to sit at his feet, or follow Him in the way.

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 25.

² Ruth iii. 18.

In due season the Christian shall reap, if he faint not. God is the best judge of the time when his mercies shall be most happily distributed; his glory most effectually manifested; and the birth of his people's blessedness made more remarkable and illustrious. And when a spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon the heart to plead, and faith hath its gracious exercise in prayer, the moment of deliverance and of accomplished promise is near at hand; even as the redemption of Israel followed hard upon the cry and groaning of the people, in the land of their bondage.

(3.) Faith is the *highest and most renowned of all those graces*, wherewith the Christian is endowed, for likeness and conformity to his Lord. All other virtues, indeed, are the daughters and descendants of faith. In the eternal state of joy and glory to body and soul, love will be supreme; but faith obtains the victory to the Church militant upon earth. Love takes possession of the happiness that shall be imparted; but faith gives the title in Christ Jesus, to its enjoyment. It influences every other exhibition of the Saviour's mind, whereby the heirs of salvation adorn his doctrines in all things. *All the rest of the daughters have done*

virtuously, *but this excelleth them all.*¹ We apprehend by faith; (if indeed we are apprehended of Christ Jesus, in the sovereignty of divine mercy,) that we may enjoy by love. Love unites God with his saints in their ultimate felicity, but faith in the Redeemer first united them to Him, as members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. In short, faith hath been well described by one in other days,² as the best gift to man; the soul of his soul; the spring and fountain of all holiness; the great feature of the sons of God; the key whereby the treasures, that are laid up in the fulness of the Saviour, are opened to his brethren, the joint heirs of his kingdom. It is the mother of sound joy; the watchful and tender nurse of a good conscience; the pledge of an eternal inheritance; the earnest of peace with God; the seal of election; the way of ascent from earth to heaven; the token of union with Christ, when directed to Him as its object: and the band is as indissoluble as beautiful, whereby the soul of its happy possessor is bound to all the promises, and to the glory of which they testify. Lord, enable us thus to appreciate

¹ Prov. xxi. 29.

² Ball on Faith, p. 131.

this grace in its preciousness ! Lord, increase our faith !

(4.) It is a *laborious, self-denying grace*. "*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place, which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed ; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*" While it hath an eye to see Emmanuel, as the great Master whom the ransomed of the Lord are bound to serve ; it hath a hand to labour in his cause, and a will to glory in that service, as the soul's perfect freedom. The same grace which delights to receive the promise, springs forth to obey the command. And there is no truth in the volume of God's unerring counsel more sure, nor yet more solemn to a professing Christian—(may his Spirit impress it deeply upon our hearts,) than that which declares, that, "*as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*"¹

(5.) Faith, when directed to the Son of God, is *peculiarly a grace of redeemed man*. It discovers the excellences of the appointed Saviour, as the Gospel testifies of them all ; and his infinite fitness to fulfil the amazing office

¹ James ii. 26.

which his unimaginable love charged upon Him. It discovers also his especial relation to the lost and guilty creatures, whose nature He undertook, for their salvation. The angels see his goodness, and adore Him for its exercise, with hallelujahs, louder and more sweet, than can be uttered by the hosts of the ransomed, upon earth. They desire to look into the rich provision made by Him, for bringing many sons and daughters unto glory; but they can never believe in Christ, for salvation, and therefore can never taste the sweetness of faith, as it fills a believer's heart with light and gladness. The unsinning angels have not fallen under the curse of God; and therefore cannot need an atonement, and a substitute to bear his infinite wrath against iniquity. The angels who kept not their first estate, are reserved unto judgment, and for ever excluded from all participation in his love. How dear then, in this view, should be the life of faith, connecting as it does the believer with the Lord of life and glory, as a brother and a portion, and placing elect and unsinning angels in their proper relation towards the household of God, "*as ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation!*"¹

¹ Heb. i. 14.

(6.) Faith is a grace of *unspeakable comfort to its happy possessor*. It leads him to the Rock that is higher than himself. It is a refuge in every danger; a solace in every trial; a hope among all billows; a light in all darkness; a star in all gloom; a constellation indeed, whereby to sail upon the dismal and stormy sea of life. The joy of faith is that, with which a stranger cannot intermeddle; for it cometh down from above. It is the product of an atmosphere, into which nothing entereth that defileth. It brings the Physician of the Gospel and the balm of Gilead to the bruised and broken heart. It makes "*the light affliction which is but for a moment work for the believer a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while he looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.*"¹ And therefore did the Lord who knew the need of his brethren, and was Himself the exhaustless storehouse of their consolations, direct them, in every temptation, to exercise faith upon Him. "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*"²

(7.) Faith is a *prudential grace*. It weighs

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

² John xiv. 1.

the objects which the god of this world and the God of heaven offer to its notice, in the balances of right reason,—that is, of reason enlightened by the truth-giving influence of the Holy Spirit; and decides accordingly. It measures them by the cubit of the sanctuary. It assays the ore offered as a possession, according to the infallible test of Scripture; and casts away the dross, however glittering, to secure the gold, however dark and unpromising it may now appear. And here faith follows the pattern, not only of Abram, but of Abram's great exemplar, "who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame." It freely surrenders all the perishing vanities of time and sense; all the fashion of this world which passeth away; all the pleasures of sin that are but for a season; with whatever seductions the devil may invest them, to follow God, to have a portion with his family, and an inheritance in his inheritance of salvation. Carnal and sensual men will stigmatize this choice as folly; but faith is taught of God, and hath made a better estimate. The Christian discovers a snare and defilement, under the gilded allurements of a world that lieth in wickedness; because he surveys them through the truth-giving

medium of the Scriptures, and of God's decision in his word; as Judas saw the blood of his master, and another image than Cæsar's upon the money for which he sold the Saviour—with this happy difference, however, that faith sees and knows the utter worthlessness of the bribe, and, therefore, indignantly rejects it; and on the other hand hath learned the preciousness of Christ, who must be betrayed, unless the price of the treason against Him be trodden under foot. Sight and sense think much of this world, and meanly of that to come, with all its untold and unimaginable depths of blessedness; just as one ignorant of astronomy, would think the earth on which he dwells, the most stupendous object in the universe; and the great lights of heaven; to be only the twinkling sparks which they appear to his eye. But he, who hath learned to measure the distances, revolutions, and bulk of the worlds around him in the vastness of space, is aware that his own little planet is but as a speck in the system, and estimates it, and the mighty centres of other worlds accordingly. Faith therefore, the knowledge of a mind truly enlarged, (for God hath taught it,) resists the solicitations of the flesh, whereby others are led captive; beholding sta-

bility and preciousness only in those promises 'which have the oath of God to make them sure, and the love of God to make them sweet.'¹

Are these indeed the characteristics of faith? Did they distinguish Abram in his walk? Are they the features whereby every spiritual descendant of this great parent and pattern of the Christian church must be distinguished? Is it true that without faith it is impossible to please God? Then if the language of every heart could be heard, as God surely hears it, in what voice ought it to speak, and what sentiments ought it to convey to the mind? Surely the expression of one voice, the outpouring of one thought—a language of the spirit as identical in every individual, as the world's one speech before it was confounded at Babel—" *Lord, we believe; help thou our unbelief!* "

Having thus described some particulars in the NATURE of Faith, it remains very briefly to seek

II. ITS ORIGIN.

And we are ignorant of the very alphabet of all saving truth, if we cannot trace it to its home in heaven, and its birth, in the power of God upon man's heart. Faith is

¹ Spurstowe on the Promises. P. 26.

a virtuous principle; and therefore, like every other good and perfect gift is from above. Unbelief is the natural element of man, as respects all his transactions with spiritual things. And while he is obliged to live by faith upon his fellow worms, who are crushed before the moth, whose counsel is folly, and their strength weakness; he turns away from God, in absolute distrust concerning every part of his spiritual existence, prospects, duties, and hopes. "*Without God in the world*" is stamped upon all his procedures. O the wretchedness and misery of the fall! The ruin into which man was precipitated by sin hath no deeper or darker gulph, (save that which shall for ever close over his lost soul if he come not to Christ) than the unbelief that reigns within him, and which in his own strength, were he even willing to be delivered, he could no more escape, than he could throw off the world's weight, if he were buried beneath it. Man, in the very act of leaving God, by the first transgression, turned his gaze wholly towards sensible objects, and hath no desire to credit divine revelation. Pride is his besetting sin; and as faith can be only grounded in humility, an unconverted man cannot live in belief on God. "*The carnal mind is enmity against*

Him.¹ Corrupt and darkened reason is the adversary of faith: and even as a fallen man sets up his own will against the *law*, so doth he direct his own imaginary wisdom against the wisdom of the Most High. Sensuality and the love of sin, so entirely occupy the avenues to many hearts, that faith may not find entrance; and the God of this world blinds the eyes of them that believe not. He must be resisted by the Christian soldier, steadfast in the faith: and therefore unbelief is, so to speak, his victory. And the advantage gained by him through unbelief, is great and deadly.

Whence then hath the life of faith its rise and origin? What is the fountain of its being and flow within the heart of man? It is exclusively the gift of God, in his Trinity of persons. It is a bestowment of the *Father*, when it fixes the soul on Christ; "for no man can come to Him as a Saviour, except the Father draw him." It is a communication of the *Son*; because He is emphatically the Author and Finisher of our faith. It is a work of the *Holy Spirit*; because He takes of the things of Christ and shews them to the heirs of the kingdom, and fastens them

¹ Rom. viii. 7.

upon the heart. Wherefore He is called the Spirit of faith, because this blessed grace is of his free gift and operation.

They who receive the Lamb of God—(and without such reception of Him by faith there is no salvation) have power given to them by Him, to become the sons of God. But they are brought and born into this infinitely precious relation, *not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*¹ A transcendent power was put forth in raising Jesus from the grave, when the sins of the world, with all their tremendous weight, lay upon Him to crush Him down. That same power which raised Him, and was therefore the mere and absolute act of Omnipotence, enlightens the will, subdues the rebellious mind, and is, by faith, the resurrection of the soul from its death in trespasses and sins. “*Unto you first,*” saith the Apostle, addressing the church at Philippi, “*it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for his sake.*”² “*By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.*”³ And this Apostolic position is as entirely true,

¹ John i. 13.

² Phil. i. 29.

³ Ephes. ii. 8.

concerning the faith of God's word, which over-ruled Noah to build the ark, or Abram to leave his country, as concerning that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whereby He becomes to its happy possessor the end of the law for righteousness. If the hand or eye of man be wanting from his birth, only Almightyness can supply them. By what other power then, shall that hand of faith be created, which reacheth to heaven, and lays hold of all its fulness in the tree of life? By what other power shall that spiritual eye be formed, and opened in the soul, which beholds those things within the vail, and regards them as a believer's rightful and unalienable portion, in the testament of God's free, eternal, and unchangeable mercy by Jesus Christ?

But although faith be thus a gift, resulting from the pure unmerited benevolence of God, yet must it be sought in the use of means. Marriage was never regarded as superfluous for the propagation of mankind, because the soul of the child is not generated by its parents, but created and infused by God; even so, the fact, that faith is given to man by spiritual infusion, should rather quicken than abate his desire to obtain it. Now faith comes instrumentally by

hearing, and hearing by the word of 'But this word,' the unbeliever will not spiritually discerned; and the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; then can I obtain faith by hearing or the word of God; when faith is presupposed in any profitable acquaintance with it? The sovereignty of his grace, the key to unlock this difficulty. It is the means of putting to shame, this poor object of infidelity. The action of the Holy Spirit in creating faith in us, goes before the exercise of faith. But the beginning of faith is the receiving of the Holy Ghost. And if the word of God is become dear to any of you—its significance more plain than heretofore,—and of whom it testifies, more precious than formerly to your hearts—then have you a spiritual discernment; and your faith is increased in the study of the scriptures of God. Read the holy volume. Pray, as God enable you, for light to understand, and to receive, and love to embrace it. And as Jesus bade the man with the withered arm stretch it forth, and the natural impediment was removed, while he made the effort; so you, once infidels concerning all the infi-

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disclosures of the written and revealed life, understand it, and enjoy it in its Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the First and the Last of Christian faith. Be diligent in the use of all the of grace: and trust, as you pray, that use of means, in faith unto salvation, shall be imparted richly to you. The scales of infirmity will fall away; the eye of simple-minded faith will be opened; and while you look upon the wonders of redemption, in their length, and breadth, and depth, they will be new and delightful to you. Then you will each cry with him whom the Lord healed, "*One thing I know, that as I was blind, now I see.*"

SERMON VII.

THE OBJECTS AND WARRANT OF FAITH.

HEBREWS XI. 8.

BY FAITH ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS CALLED TO GO OUT INTO A PLACE WHICH HE SHOULD AFTER RECEIVE FOR AN INHERITANCE, OBEYED; AND HE WENT OUT, NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT.

IN those complicated machines which exhibit the triumphs of scientific invention and arrangement, there are often movements, contrary to the general direction in which the force is to be applied. An unpractised eye therefore, might easily imagine them rather calculated to diminish or disturb, than to increase the whole effect. But the mechanist himself knows full well that they form absolutely essential parts of his system; and that his work would be inefficient, incomplete, or even useless without them. The whole is constructed on one simple

principle : and these seeming paradoxes are among the most beautiful, although to many, the least intelligible portion of that harmonious adaptation of means to an end, which the inventor's forethought had embraced, in all their beauty and variety. When Ezekiel saw by the river Chebar, that vision, which shadowed forth the course of providential government, there were wheels crossing each other, in a manner that might appear to contradict the simplicity of a straight-forward direction. But the circles thus crossed gave the spherical form, which enabled them to move in any direction, and that with entire uniformity. Whithersoever the Spirit went, they went; and they turned not when they went. That Spirit was at once their impulse and guide; and they accomplished the thing whereto God had sent them, however little the prophet, at first uninstructed, might have expected a result so simple and effectual.¹

Now such is the life of faith. It is often in apparent contradiction to the suggestions of sight and sense. But "*the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.*"² And while mere worldly philosophy looks upon a believer's con-

¹ Ezek. i.

² 1 Cor. iii. 19.

versation with wonder, or turns away from the contemplation of what it deems to be utter folly, with great contempt, because it cannot discern and understand the secret springs and movements, which God in Christ supplies, when by the Holy Ghost he fills the heart with faith and love, the great King of his saints is directing and overruling every seemingly discordant motion, to his own glory, and the good of his church. A perfect regularity is there; and every change is the consequence of laws, designed, not by human skill, much less by blind chance and accident, but by the unerring wisdom of Jehovah Himself.

I have already occupied one discourse with some remarks upon the *Nature and Origin of Faith*, as a general principle of obedience. I shall now pursue the subject by examining,

III. THE OBJECTS OF FAITH. In its more enlarged acceptation, it is conversant with all truth revealed by God in his word, and therefore by Him, and by his supreme authority made binding upon every man, into whose hands the Bible falls. That faith, whereby the soul is justified, being invested with the righteousness of God in his incarnate Son, embraces and rests on Christ's obedience unto

death, that believing men may find life in Him. It cleaves to his person and work; cleaves to God's mercies exhibited in his sacrifice, with its unceasing outpouring of the life of mercy, to every one who comes thirsting to its waters, and turning away from every other confidence, to Him as "*made of God, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*"¹

As faith then justifies, He is the full and glorious object of Christian belief. But the truth, mercy, fidelity, and power of God, with all the benefits of his free goodness, past and to come, which it hath pleased Him, or shall please Him, to bestow upon his disciples, are the important and heart-stirring objects, wherein that faith, which is his work upon the soul, is exercised. It embraces the commandments, believes the threatenings, rejoices in the exceeding great and precious promises of the everlasting gospel, made concerning the life that now is, and that which is to come. It does not mangle and divide obedience, rejecting that part of divine requirement which may exact the bearing of a cross, heavy and distasteful to the evil heart of unbelief, and embracing others,

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30.

among which flesh and blood would delight to dwell. The true obedience of a living faith is universal.

God in his attributes, and more especially in his Truth, is essentially the first object of faith. His *goodness* is the immediate object of *love*. His *power* is the centre of *hope*: but his absolute and unchangeable *truth* attracts the eye, and forms the blessed resting place of faith. "*God is not a man that He should lie, nor the Son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it; or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?*"¹ "*He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true.*"² Faith therefore rests on Him, as the Father who made and upholds the universe, and all its parts and interests. It looks to Him, as loving the Church in Christ, before the foundation of the world; as that covenant God, who will never leave nor forsake his servants, but supply all their need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus; as the Father of all believers in Himself and his Son, making them the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, as a God pardoning sin, and justifying the ungodly.

¹ Numb. xxiii. 19.

² John iii. 33.

When turned towards the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world, Faith beholds Him as that “*great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, whom the Father hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.*”¹ Christ therefore, in his person, and in all his offices; but especially Christ crucified, is the sun and centre of saving faith. All the other parts of revelation conduct faith, as by the hand, to this full, pure, open laver for sin and for uncleanness; to this throne, whereon faith, when it hath reached it, sits and glories in Christ, the wisdom of God, and the power of God, unto the salvation of all them that believe. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, was the object of the first promise; the reality and acceptableness of every sacrifice; the substance of every type; and the ample fulfilment of the whole law. As faith is exercised unto knowledge in the understanding of God, it comes to Immanuel as its Prophet to be taught. As it is exercised unto sanctification, to cast down the principalities and powers of sin, it regards Him as a King; but as it looks for justification, it magnifies Him, and flies to

¹ 1 Tim. iii. 16. Rom. iii. 25.

the unsearchable, precious atonement of his effectual Priesthood. It beholds, and embraces Him especially in this blessed office, adventuring all the mighty and everlasting interests of the soul upon him, saying with Esther, "If I perish, I perish." It flees to him, as Adonijah and Joab to the horns of the altar. There it knows the sure refuge, and feels that none shall pluck the believing fugitive from that inviolable sanctuary.

And that Holy Spirit, who with the Father and the Son is essential God, in the unity of divine Essence, is a glorious object of Christian belief. The Father will keep the children of his household, and the heirs of his glory, by his power, through faith unto salvation. The Son of God, the word made flesh, hath most triumphantly accomplished that salvation, by his mediatorial undertaking. But who shall commence, who shall carry forward, who shall complete the work of infinite grace, until it have its consummation in unimaginable glory? Surely none other than the Holy Ghost, unto whom the whole mysterious process must be committed; and through whose covenant engagement, brought triumphantly forward to its fulfilment, by the hand of Almightyness, He who

hath begun a good work in the heirs of salvation, will perform it, until the day of Jesus Christ.

Here then are objects, on which faith may be worthily employed ; here a length, and breadth, and depth, and height of revealed mercy, with which it may be fittingly conversant, until it shall be swallowed up in the everlasting vision of the glorified. Here is the supply of every want ; the inconceivably full and perfect accomplishment of every gracious desire ; the balm of infinite efficacy for every malady of that lost body of man, his body of sin and death, whereby the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint ; and here are the fountains of those depths of blessedness which are as pure as they are profound.

God himself calls us to the exercise of this grace. .He opens all his heart of love to sinners, intreats them to flee from his tremendous sentence in the law that condemns them, and that must crush every hope in the dust, while they lie beneath its penalty. He implores them to betake themselves to the appointed salvation, that they may be "*washed, justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*"¹ And will you

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 11.

indeed remain without? Will not the rent vail, and the view into the holy of holies, the riches of God's love in his Son, induce you to arise, and go to Him by faith? "*When Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? Behold I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence, that we may live and not die.*"¹ Even so, do we tell you, that that there is an ample and everlasting salvation in the land of God, whither every soul that would not die eternally, must travel; where the Almighty administrator waits in sovereign love to dispense it; and where the hearing and the heart of faith have been blessed, times without number, in the proclamation of mercy: "*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price: whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*"²

I am very far from asserting that Abram possessed, at this period of his history, the faith which embraced the whole substance of salva-

¹ Gen. xlii. 1, 2.

² Is. lv. 1, 2.

tion by Jesus Christ, or that such full and clear belief was the supremely operating principle in his heart, when he forsook all the fellowship in which he had delighted. The immediate object of the patriarch's faith, was the possession of Canaan. But his eye rested on something, whereof Canaan was only the type. "*He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*" The basis of his faith was the revelation and promise of God, either expressed or implied; and to this general faith was added, as we are well assured, that whereby he was held righteous before God, as the secrets of salvation in Immanuel were opened to his mind. It must be here observed, that as no man hath seen God at any time, and as the person who appeared to the patriarchs under the name of Jehovah, was the Lord Jesus Christ, so the object of Abram's confidence was the Lord Himself. The character and objects of faith, have been the same under every dispensation of the church. Its *character* has been man's credit given to the divine testimony: its *object* has been Christ as the way, and eternal bliss as the end.

IV. Hence therefore we pass to consider
THE WARRANT OF FAITH. It is the word of

God, as the oracle of his truth, the depository of his mind, and the glass, wherein to see those exceeding great and precious promises, of which Christ is alike the sum and the security ; and upon which the Holy Ghost, the light of his word, and the light of his church, pours that radiance which enables an open heart to receive and understand it. “ *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.*”¹ We do receive such earthly witness continually, in the things of present concernment. Would God we confined it there ; and did not allow its deluding and lying testimony, in the things of salvation, to outweigh the truth of God ; in the revelation of his mind. And therefore, inas-much as his faithfulness exceeds that of men ; his power, that of the worms of the dust ; his wisdom, the blindness of human folly ; his light, the mists of human darkness ; his infallibility, the suggestions of human error ;—by just so much, (that is, infinitely) should our faith find the warrant for its exercise, in the word of God, rather than in the opinions of men. “ *Heaven and earth shall pass away ; but that word shall not pass away.*”² The moving power,

¹ 1 John v. 9.

² Mark xiii, 31.

whereby Abram was compelled to leave his home, was confidence. God summoned him to this most hazardous and important journey; and he readily obeyed the summons. Why? There is no other imaginable reason—none at least that will bear examination, except his entire confidence in the character and directions of God. His heart was divinely impressed with the persuasion of safety and happiness, in submitting implicitly to the guidance of Him who gave the command. He deemed it best for himself, and best for his family, to commit himself and all his concerns to a Being so gracious, as faith attested God to be. Moreover, the divine character being to his eye so beautiful, so glorious, so lovely, the confidence demanded from him became the spring of his delight and happiness.¹

Now the high and glorious attributes of mercy, wisdom, power, love, and truth, residing in God, and upon which, rest the assured execution of that salvation which hath been wrought out for lost and guilty men, in Christ Jesus, can only be known to us from God's declaration of them in his word. He set his

¹ Dwight's Theology, II. 602.

bow in the cloud ; not only to look upon it Himself, and to remember the everlasting covenant made between Him and all flesh ; but that Noah also and his descendants, might see the same sign of unchanging mercy ; believe it, and rest upon that peace-giving faith. Even so does He put forth his word, the message and assurance of his love ; not merely, that He may regard in it the written covenant of salvation, and remember all his promises ; but that men also, may look into the same glorious record, and have life, and peace, and joy, and hope that maketh not ashamed, in its pages, filled as they are with love, and by divine fidelity assured of their accomplishment.

Faith pleads this record, and lives upon its certainty and sweetness. “ *Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.*”¹ We can see God savingly nowhere else : and when that word hath found entrance into the mind, as the Holy Ghost unlocks it, the desires of its awakened affections come forth to plead the fulfilment of all the promises. “ *So do as thou hast said.*” Faith realizes, faith appropriates the terrors of the

¹ Psalm cxix. 49.

he, and saith, ' I am he whom they threaten, and I perish for ever, if they fall upon me.' Faith in the day of the soul's glad espousals to Christ, as He is revealed within the heart, and takes possession of it as his own, embraces pardon, life, holiness in Him, by the Scripture, exclaiming, " Unto me is the word of this salvation sent." And, thus embracing, thus possessing, faith prepares to follow God through all the way of his commandments; and in the path of a holy self-denial, wherein the disciples of the Lord are commanded to walk.

And surely this glorious word hath a message unto all—a summons full of love to every man; that he may receive it by faith. It saith unto the wicked, "*Thou shalt surely die:*" But it adds, "*As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; wherefore turn yourselves and live ye.*"¹ To the self-righteous idolater of his own merit, it saith, "*By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified:*" but it beckons and points him to "*Christ Jesus, the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*"² To the sin-convinced and broken heart, it testifies, that

¹ Ezek. iii. 18; xviii. 32.

² Rom. iii. 20; x. 4.

*"the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin:"*¹ and invites the weary to Him for rest. To those who are struggling in a fierce conflict with the power of Satan, allied to their own inward sin—the word comes forth in the beauty of its promise, that God will subdue all their iniquities, as well as cast their sins into the depths of the sea. *"I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh. From all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you."*² Are any smitten down into the dust of abasement, by the sense of utter helplessness, in self, and in the powers of natural man? The word declares to such a trembling mourner, *"My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness."*³ Is any lamenting over a spiritual barrenness of heart, which seems to allow the production only of thorns and briars, fit but to be burned, instead of bearing fruit to God? The word assures him, that the Eternal Spirit *"will pour floods upon the dry ground, and make it bring forth fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."* Is any one tempted to fear for present supply? The assurance is given

¹ 1 John i. 7.² Ezek. xxxvi. 25.³ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

in the word, and Christ is the speaker, “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.*”¹

Approach then, and plead these pledges of eternal truth, made to you in that unchanging word, as the case of each and every one of you may need. Come in your necessity: expect the supply; and “according to your faith, so shall it be done unto you.” You have the promise and the oath of God, and if they are not as the pillars of the throne, whereon He sits and reigns, to be the sure resting places of faith, then can we conceive a God without moral perfections—an utter, and an everlasting impossibility.

But, I would most affectionately address those who study the word of God by their reason, rather than by their faith, when they look into it at all—and think natural, without spiritual apprehension, abundantly sufficient to understand it. I would beseech them, not unreasonably to demand more evidence, as they may choose to call it, of the truth of Scripture than God hath seen fit to give. He has vouchsafed enough: and if a mystery or a difficulty should make a reader of Scripture fly off into

¹ Matt. vi. 33.

doubt or infidelity of that word, which to a spiritual eye is plainly stamped with the broad seal of God's veracity, the Most High may justly allow that self-deluded one to believe a lie, and to be eternally ruined in his delusion.

Thomas may say in his guilty incredulity, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." But where is the warrant, that mercy will condescend to this unreasonable infidelity? Where is the warrant, that every demand which unbelief, in its insatiable lust of proof, may see fit to urge, shall be met and granted by a Saviour so insulted, who at the same time unerringly knows the measure of that evidence which most worthily befits Him to give, and should be held sufficient by his creature to receive. "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing." If the Bible hath been shown to be the word of God, then there is no appeal from its statements. They each and all demand to be received upon peril of our souls. Nor must we dispute a single truth,

which that bright record of holiness and mercy contains, because we may not discover a mass of satisfactory explanation, to fill the ever-cragging gulph of incredulity. Our unwillingness to credit God, loves to conceal its practical atheism beneath the flimsy veil of desire after satisfactory proof. “*If it be marvellous in your eyes, should it be also marvellous in mine eyes, with the Lord of Hosts?*”¹ Those mysteries which excite the wonder and scorn of the rational sceptic, are none to Him who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all.

The Holy Ghost might indeed accumulate the proofs of his word, beyond the possibility even of an unbelieving thought. But then where were the moral agency of man? God makes all his glory of redemption to pass before our eyes in the book of life. If we will not believe upon the evidence which He has been pleased to afford, He will leave us in the darkness of our infidelity, and we must perish in our sins. Abram’s evidence of the divine character and call, was such as the subtle refinements of modern scepticism would laugh to scorn. Yet he believed God; he was blessed

¹ Zech. viii. 6.

in his faith; and is now in an elevation of happiness, as much beyond all the good that earth can give, as the counsels of his heavenly guide and portion, the guide and portion of all who are made partakers of like precious faith, are beyond the reach of those who would judge them at the bar of human reason, or the comprehension of those who drop their little pitchers into the sea of God's counsels, and fancy they have fathomed its depths, and exhausted its waters.

If your faith then is to stand and have its warrant, "not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God;" if you are not to be of them who draw back from receiving the bidding of Jehovah unto perdition, but of them who believe to the saving of the soul, you must search the Scriptures. You must search them with true and honest hearts. You must search them, not shrinking with a false and guilty sensitiveness from those truths which may offend your prejudices, and shock the poor formless idol of the reasoning faculty, which so many adore, while they defy the God whom they will not understand. You must expect and desire the lighting down of the arm, and the spiritual weapon of the Holy Ghost which may "cast

down imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God ; ” and you must be willing that every thought should be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.¹

Are the great and glorious truths of salvation, on which depend the peace and hope of every man, as they place Christ, his Almighty refuge before him, so difficult, that they cannot be understood? Are they so oppressive and severe, that they ought to be at once rejected? And is death beneath the offer of his salvation, to be preferred before the life it brings? Are those truths so uninviting in their aspect, that there is no wonder why men should turn away from them in dislike? Or, is the testimony whereon they rest, so uncertain, or so unworthy of belief, that it may be safely rejected? Assuredly not. “ *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not; lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* ” ² Examine the Bible, that treasure-house of mercy, with minds befitting those who

¹ 2 Cor. x. 5.

² 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

has God for its Author;
 its joyful persuasion, that it
 is free from mixture of error for its
 sake, that it has the everlast-
 ingly redeemed in Christ Jesus,
 its Author. Read it, with earnest
 desire, of being dazzled and con-
 founded by its amazingly glorious simplicity
 that you may know what is the hope
 and what the riches of mercy
 that are in the light of the grace
 that it points them. Read it;
 believe it, that He who gave it,
 will give it to your hearts, and make it an
 instrument to save your souls. You
 will witness of its preciousness
 that the life of sense will then
 be of faith. You will then
 find whatever resting place of
 rest, God may have found
 for you. You will then "*lay aside*
the sin that doth so easily
with patience the race that
*leadeth to Jesus."*¹ Then, as
 we, of whom we have been

THE OBJECTS AND WARRANT OF FAIT

speaking, is said to have carried the light of knowledge of his Saviour far into the world, after unsought mercy had restored him from unbelief, and opened all the springs of life to you, recovered from the heart of unbelief; enabled to cast a ready infidelity; enabled for you; and upon Him who careth for the happiness of the world, may be the Redeemer's witnesses. Then, as you meet, in his mind, the rudiments of the happiness of those who are to retain God in all their knowledge, you may say, beholding the beauty and holiness of the walk of faith in your daily life, "We will go with you, for God is with you." Zechariah viii. 23.

1. Tech. viii. 28

SERMON VIII.

THE EXERCISE OF FAITH.

HEBREWS XI. 8.

BY FAITH, ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS CALLED TO GO OUT INTO A PLACE WHICH HE SHOULD AFTER RECEIVE FOR AN INHERITANCE, OBEYED ; AND HE WENT OUT, NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT.

THE Most High invariably deals with man as a reasonable creature, and never demands his belief in any revelation, without communicating abundant evidences of its truth, and divine original. When Moses was sent to deliver Israel from captivity, the wonder-working rod was put into his hands, and the miracles wrought by it, were to attest and authorize his high commission. In like manner, those amazing communications of the Holy Ghost, contained in the Scriptures, bear upon every part of them the broad seal of divine veracity, and demand our entire reception of them, upon an extent

of evidence, which only the perversity of infidelity, loving darkness rather than light, can adventure to deny. But as the pole supports the vine, yet gives no life to its root; so reason, when it has directed the faith of man to the Scriptures of God, as its rule and warrant, must there end its labour, and leave faith in the mysteries of the book of salvation, to draw its being from the Spirit of light and truth, as He does his sovereign work of love upon the heart. And hence, the meanest, as well as the mightiest understanding, is equally capable of salvation beneath that omnipotent influence. Such a faith is no speculative frame of mind, the too frequent result of intellectual pride, which, after all its presumptuous searchings into the hidden things of God, is only dazzled and confounded by them; as one might be, who should climb the summit of a perilous steep with much giddiness of brain, to look upon the sun, when it might be equally well, and much more safely regarded, from the level ground which he had left. Such a belief, I repeat, the act of God within the heart, is an operative principle, and works by love, under the influence of the same eternal Spirit who called it into being.

Having therefore already seen **THE NATURE, ORIGIN, OBJECTS, and WARRANT** of faith, we proceed to notice

V. THE EXERCISE OF FAITH. In Abram, it was no cold assent of the understanding to the reasonableness of a proposition, while the will remained unmoved, and the affections uninfluenced. It was no body without the soul, no form and mockery of a living principle, as the dead man in his shroud, and coffin, and grave, is a poor semblance of him who breathes, and thinks and labours; but the work of God's own hand. It was life, testified by the acts of life. It led him to go forth at Jehovah's bidding, from all that was dear and tempting to his heart; not knowing whither he went. It led him to sojourn in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; in testimony that he looked for a "*city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.*"¹ It led him to offer up Isaac, his son, the Son of God's own promise; accounting that God was able to raise the miraculously given child from the dead. Faith is

¹ Heb. xi. 8—10.

no idle grace; for then, indeed, were it not a grace, but a counterfeit, the delusive work of Satan, who changes himself into an angel of light, that he may deceive and ruin. As it hath an eye to see Christ, all and in all for salvation, all in grace, and all in glory; so hath it a heart to love Him, and a hand to labour in his cause. It hath not merely a willingness to believe the promises of the everlasting Gospel, which are the wine and milk, the marrow and fitness of spiritual life; but a holy readiness to obey the precepts of that glorious revelation of the blessed God. The title of the land was given to Abram, in the sure promise of the Most High; but the Amorite was in possession: and he must have in his own person no inheritance; no, not so much as whereupon to set his foot, save that, which he borrows as a habitation, and buys as a burial place. Yet does he persist in the obedience of faith, and honours the God of his mercies, by patient continuance in well doing.

Faith chafes and warms the benumbed spirit into love, by contemplating the truth, grace, and compassion of the Saviour; and then works by that love, to do the will of God. Faith, looking upon blessedness to come, in the glass

of the Gospel, longs for that promised glory, and treads the way of God's appointment towards it; like as Israel saw the fruits of Canaan, and desired to possess the land from whence they came. O for a principle thus buoyant, and bearing our hearts upwards, to have their conversation in heaven, and so to dwell with Jesus there, above the world; and to be the impulse, whereby we may tread the wilderness without fainting, and fight the good fight of faith, under the great Captain of our salvation, without shrinking from the conflict!

(1.) *Faith hath a proper exercise in matters of temporal concernment.* While we remain in our earthly house of this tabernacle, our heavenly Father knoweth that the body must be regarded, and that its wants must be supplied, What an awful measure of atheism, do those wants of our perishing frame produce in the mind of men, who live by sight and sense alone! They are up early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, and dwell in a feverish anxiety after this world's abundance, which has its sad reaction in the listlessness, the palsy, and the death of all spiritual mindedness. We throw the clay and dust, which we thus labour to collect, into those wells of thought and feel-

ing, which ought to be filled with the life of God within our souls ; as the Philistines stopped up with earth the fountains which Abraham had digged in Gerar. But, when a man truly begins to live the life of faith, how mighty a relief does he obtain from the corroding and peace-destroying hand of all undue worldly solicitudes ! “ *He is careful for nothing ; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, makes his requests known unto God : and the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keeps his heart and mind by Christ Jesus.*”¹ He seeks first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; and rests persuaded that all things shall be added to him, according to the true manner and fitting measure of unerring wisdom. Did Hezekiah take care that the Levites should have their portion, duly provided, and so be encouraged in the law of the Lord ?² And shall not that covenant God, who calls men in Christ to his kingdom and glory, and (what includes both,) to the supreme blessedness of his service, be careful that they shall want no manner of thing that is good ? A believer’s *body* is as essentially in covenant with

¹ Phil. iv. 6, 7.

² 2 Chron. xxxi. 4.

God, as his *soul* can be; and therefore shall have the provision which it truly needs. Such persuasion does the Eternal Spirit give; and great peace have they who enjoy it, while they cast all their care, for present necessities, as well as for spiritual and everlasting requirements, upon Him, who careth for them. Too much prosperity, would oftentimes unfit the Christian for his spiritual warfare against the world, the flesh, and the Devil; as Saul's armour would have encumbered David, in his battle with the Philistine. The believer is therefore made willing to go forth, with the better, though more simple provision of his sling and his stone. On the other hand, a filial confidence in the grace and wisdom of God, is the tree that sweetens the waters of every affliction, to those who are called to sojourn for a little while in Marah. The Christian's covenant God is Jehovah-Jireh; and in the mount of all difficulties, the Lord will appear for his help. It provides a firm ground, on which faith stands, when it comes before the throne to ask, "Give us this day our daily bread," to know that the kingdom, and the power, and the glory belong to God. The same knowledge provides a like resting for hopeful prayer, that his name may be hallowed, his

its proper and needful exercise in
resting peacefully upon the persua-
sions of those distinguished children of mercy
of salvation, who are to know the
truth which passeth knowledge, in the
personal experience, and to be filled
with the fulness of God, shall want no man-
nally good, which their Father may
bestow to suit to their necessities and pros-
perity of children yet in the body, and not
come to their Father's house, or to the
presence of their elder Brother.

*at pardon of sin, which is linked to the
: of the Lamb of God, is a happy and
! subject for the exercise of faith.
al belief is persuaded miraculously,
power of the Holy Ghost, that Christ is
: God's right hand, to be a Prince and
; to give repentance and remission of*

*together ; Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow ; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be as wool."*¹ Faith is the channel opened by the Spirit into the heart, whereby the blessings of the atonement are conveyed thither. It receives that glorious record where the Saviour preached the whole Gospel of his grace. "*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life."*² The ambassadors of Christ come, beseeching men in his stead to be reconciled to God. Faith receives their message. Faith confesses in its deep joy, that the coming of the Son of God in human flesh to save sinners is worthy of all acceptation. Faith sees, knows, glories in Him ; and prostrates its happy possessor before Him, as convinced Thomas, after the resurrection, crying, " My Lord and my God." Faith discovers the fountain of that pardon in undeserved mercy ; and brings the soul weary and heavy laden unto Christ for rest. Faith leans upon mercy alone ; and mercy is promised, that men might believe, as God works faith

¹ Isa. i. 18.² John iii. 16.

within them. Faith believes that promise which hath enkindled everlasting wonder among all the principalities and powers of heaven: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin." ¹ Faith is poured forth in strong desire, and in the heart's wrestling to obtain the full purification of that mysterious fountain. Faith humbles the soul, and places it side by side with the publican in the temple, to receive a free forgiveness, in the Propitiation of the Cross. It clings to Him, and to his accomplished work of love. It lays hold of the promise; and being persuaded of justification, hath peace with God. Thence also follow, a filial access to the throne of grace; joy in the Holy Ghost, even a joy unspeakable and full of glory. And that joy of the Lord is a believer's strength and boldness in the day of his battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. As the pressure of the air upon our bodies from without, is counterbalanced by a reaction within, which being withdrawn, the incumbent weight would crush us to death; so is it with the soul of an unbeliever; the weight of unpardoned sin, the weight of the wrath of God for sin rests upon him. His own pride acts now against it, and makes him insensible

of the dreadful pressure. But in the judgment-day, (if not before) that inward godless support will be withdrawn; for he will see himself, as he is indeed, a daring rebel against unspeakable mercy. The weight of an offended judge's indignation will then grind him, soul and body, with every hope of both, into powder. "*Examine yourselves therefore, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.*" Draw near to the Redeemer. Know the blessedness of these happy ones, whose sins are forgiven, and whose iniquities are blotted out. Come, and understand the riches of your Lord's grace in pardon; and the price which He paid to obtain it. And come for that true joy of the heart, which ever walks in holy fellowship with love to Him, as Enoch walked with God.

(3.) *Faith is also exercised upon the promises of God for sanctification.* "*The blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, is applied by faith, and purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*"¹ Faith purifies the heart. It hides the word of life within the heart, that the children of God may not sin against Him.

¹ Heb. ix. 14.

Having those exceeding great and precious promises, whereby the believer is made a partaker of the divine nature, they enable him to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust; cleansing him from all filthiness of the flesh and Spirit; and exciting him, as the proper bias and employment of his new and noble life, to perfect holiness in the fear of God.¹ Christ's death applied to the heart, when the heart has been led in faith to his cross, is the death of sin there. His entrance into it, and union with it, is the communication and sustenance of a life of holiness. David was constrained to spare Joab, after the murder of Abner, because the sons of Zeruiah were too hard for him. But when the reign of Solomon was established, Joab was seized and slain, even at the horns of the altar. So is it in the experience of all men. While they contend against sin by their own strength, they cannot overcome it; but when the reign of the Saviour in his love is established over the heart, the time of retribution arrives, and the love of Christ slays even the besetting sin without mercy, that He may be avenged of his enemy.² The promise is securely

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 1.

² 1 Kings ii. 28—34.

made, that God will give his children a new heart, and put his Spirit within them. What He promises, faith receives; and so receiving, exhibits the truth of God in his own word, by *“ putting off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and being renewed in the spirit of the mind; and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”*¹

Those, whom God acquits of sin, and accepts as righteous unto life, through Jesus Christ, He sanctifies by his Spirit. Communion with the Lord in his death delivers from the curse. Communion with Christ in the power of his resurrection draws the Spirit upwards, to have its hidden and holy life with Him in heaven. *“ The grace of God which bringeth salvation. . . teacheth us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.”*² Satan hath fiery darts of temptation, which only faith can quench; and therefore, whatever be the fitness and temper of that armour which the Christian has from heaven, faith must be his shield. No

¹ Ephes. iv. 22, 23, 24.

² Tit. ii. 12.

superstitions of popery, no crosses, no relics, no holy water, can drive away the tempter; but only gracious belief in the person, love, and work of the Redeemer, experienced within the heart, overcoming temptation, and casting down the love of sin there, as Dagon fell from his place before the victorious ark of God. Faith trusts that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head; and therefore looks to Him for deliverance from the curse, and victory over the power of sin. It hath respect unto all the commandments of God, and begs according to his will—“*Teach me the way of thy statutes, O Lord, and I shall keep it unto the end.*” “*Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight.*”¹ Thus the Christian expects, as well as resolves; to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him. And as Moses “chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season,” so doth a believer bid temptation get behind him in the might of God. Clothed with the Sun of Righteousness, he would have the dark and waning moon beneath his feet. He “hath chosen that good

¹ Ps. cxix. 33. 35.

part which shall not be taken away from him, and hath no room in his heart, so occu-
 the indwellings of worldly love in its
 power. That love would only darken
 bedim its hope, and pollute it to the
 of sin, when it is set apart to be the
 the living God. Faith sees iniquity, trans-
 and sin, arrayed alike against the peace
 adopted family, and the honour of their
 Jehosaphat saw the children of Am
 Moab, and Mount Seir arrayed against
 and Judah, and cries, "*O God wilt thou
 them ; for we have no might against
 company that cometh against us, neither
 we what to do ; but our eyes are upon
 But then, faith, thus looking to the
 ness of God for victory, goes forth
 these enemies, and is made more than
 through the might of the Head and C
 salvation. Faith carries the soul ab
 enemies, so dreadful, so invincible
 lievers, the world's attraction, the world
 ery, the world's love, or the world's
 and fixes it upon God. "*Thou art my
 O Lord ; I have said, that I will**

words. Order my steps in thy word, and so shall not any iniquity have dominion over me."¹ It enters into every obligation of life, and quickens the Christian to run the way of God's commandments with the gracious diligence of an enlarged heart; for it carries a Saviour and a Helper with it into all duties. It girds up the loins of a Christian's mind in the sustaining power of God's gracious promise to every soldier and servant of Jesus Christ, "Go in this thy night, have not I sent thee?" And it presses onward in the strife with sin, hastening through the world's temptations and delights, like Gideon's soldiers, when they followed Midian, and stayed not to drink; but took of the water in their hands, as they passed through the river, faint, perhaps, yet still pursuing.²

(4.) *Faith has a happy exercise in the word and sacraments of its great Object, Jesus Christ.* The sun may shine, but the eye of the blind must be opened to receive it. The harmonies of sound will in vain solicit us, if the ear be not unstopped to admit them. The light of God Himself, in the declarations of his word, and the person of Immanuel;—the sweetness of all

¹ Psalm cxix. 33.

² Judges vii. viii.

compassionate invitations uttered by that gracious Redeemer, will be unnoticed, until the soul's eye be cleared of its scales of unbelief, to behold its beauty ; and the soul's sense of spiritual hearing communicated by the hand of the great Physician, to receive his word. Faith unlocks every sense of the heart, to understand, and every affection of the heart to embrace Christ, his office, his work, his salvation, his commands, his love, in the glorious Gospel of his grace. It feels the curse of sin, and the law's condemnation, as Israel felt the bite of the serpents in the wilderness—and it looks to Jesus, as the appointed cure, in pardon, peace, righteousness, and spiritual strength. It cries unto God from the depths of conscious guilt, into which the true sayings of his word have now cast it, and thence flies to Jesus. It perceives the false ground of every godless hope give way beneath it : then, crying to the appointed Redeemer, “ Lord, save me,” it feels his outstretched hand, like Peter on the sea of Galilee ; and knows its safety ; and gladly follows its Lord unto the ship of a gracious fellowship and communion.

It was well said, that the gospel of Jesus Christ penetrated farther into Britain, than the Roman armies could ever reach ; and that pure

word of his love, finds an entrance into the soul, subduing the principalities and powers of sin within it, which no arm of flesh, no carnal weapons could ever effect. Hath it found this entrance into your hearts? Hath it gained this happy triumph over them? Hath it set up the throne of Christ within them, exactly where the throne of sin and Satan had its place? Has the word been unto you a seed of spiritual life, which the Holy Ghost is still watering, through faith, unto a happy fruitfulness? Or, does that word, preached day by day, fall day by day upon the surface only of your outward sense, to be seed cast by the way side, which the devil comes and takes out of your hearts by unbelief, lest you should be saved? Are you openly opposing the gospel of the grace of God? Are you attending its ministry in a lukewarm and Laodicean spirit? Are you beholding all the mystery, and all the process, and all the sufferings, and all the pains of Redeeming love—of God in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world to Himself, with indifference; barely assenting to the glorious record of Bible truth; or snatching its promises of life and salvation to sinners with one presumptuous hand, while the other is employed, as it were,

in sinning against God, and robbing Him of glory? Or, are you by faith applying the word to your need, your pardon, peace, justification, and progress in the divine life sanctification? O, how shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation?

In the sacrament of the Lord's supper, faith is the eye, the hand, the mouth of the soul whereby it sees, receives, and feeds upon Christ. So partaken, "we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood, we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us. We are one with Christ, and Christ with us." So partaken, holy communion seals the believer's interest in Jesus, with all its rich storehouse of hope and consolation upon his heart; and bids him to enjoy them as his own. The King sits at his table, and hath fellowship with his guests, and then the spikenard of that grace will spring from the communion, giveth forth the smell thereof.¹

Faith has also a high and precious exercise in *the mysterious Laver of Baptism*. Believing parents bring their children to God in this ordinance, resting upon the promise, "I

¹ Song of Solomon i. 12.

be a God unto thee, and unto thy seed." And committing those dear gifts of their heavenly Father, as deposits into the hand of Christ,—looking for the pardon of sin by the Redeemer's blood—looking for every privilege of the new covenant in Christ Jesus—feeling that the infants so committed, are made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven; they trust that their Saviour's Father, and their own Father—that God their Redeemer, and God their Sanctifier, will guide these little ones in after life, by divine counsel, and then receive them unto glory. In the same spirit of gracious confidence, the Church receives them, to nurse them up for God. Oh! there is a sweetness in the sacrament of Baptism, unknown and unintelligible, except to the heart of faith, as it persuades and assures—that the infant so committed to Jesus, is buried with Him by Baptism unto death, and that like as Christ was raised from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so shall that child walk in newness of life—that, as it has borne the image of the earthy, it shall also bear the image of the heavenly.¹ Thus doth every true hearer of

¹ Rom. vi. 4. 1 Cor. xv. 49.

the word, every spiritual communicant, and every believing offerer of a child in Baptism, and every infant, that so partakes the divinely appointed rite, receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. "Unto you is the word of this salvation sent." May He who gives it a high commission to your hearts, implant it there, and make it the power of God to your salvation!

(5.) Once more; *Faith has a proper and delightful subject for its exercise, in prayer.* "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him: but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."¹ Faith and prayer mutually subserve and strengthen each other. "Trust in the Lord at all times: pour out your heart before Him."² The Redeemer's faithfulness is pledged for the veracity of his promise, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." The grant is unlimited, the promise unincumbered. "All things are yours," is the language of God to his children; and they are called to sue out their rightful claim, in their Great Head and Surety, by the prayer of faith. "This is the

¹ James i. 5, 6.

² Psalm lxi. 8.

*confidence that we should have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, He heareth us.*¹ *And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him*"² Faith, in supplication, realizes the omniscience of God; his willingness to hear; his unchangeable adherence to his word; the almighty intercession of the High Priest by the throne and mercy-seat of heaven. It pleads them all,—while it pleads the utter worthlessness as well as misery of the suppliant: in order that infinite love may be glorified in shewing mercy. Then, (be the subject of the petition what it may, if made according to the mind of God,) faith looks for an answer of peace; and leaves the posture of supplication, as Hannah left the temple, when her heart was relieved, and her countenance was no more sad. The dead child on the other hand, can never inherit the patrimony; and the prayer of a lifeless infidelity, can never obtain those blessings, which are the heritage of God's living sons and daughters. Faith indeed, is the soul's inward sense and act, of which prayer is the expression: and whosoever, thus

¹ James i. 5, 6,² 1 John v. 15.

feeling affiance in the promised and covenanted mercies of God, shall call upon Him, shall assuredly be saved. Whatsoever his disciples shall thus ask, in the name of Jesus, He will do. Faith is the mother of prayer; and very blessed is the fruit and offspring, unto those who dwell in its happy exercise. Jesus knew, for He knew all things, that his sheep should never perish; and therefore was the heart of his mediatorial love lifted up to heaven, crying on their behalf, "Holy Father, keep them in thy name." Paul knew assuredly that the Lord would deliver him from every evil work. How joyous and how powerful then, was his impulse to prayer, and his fervour in the privileged duty of praying without ceasing! And do not such Scriptures, and such examples as these, rebuke and put to shame those who never pray; or when they kneel, never believe their own necessities, nor the fulness of God in his Son; and so can never seek the mercy-seat aright,—but utter the words of supplication with unmoved minds, and have their reward in continual barrenness of heart? And this happens, while God waits to be duly entreated; and so to open the windows of heaven, and pour them down a blessing that there should not be room

to receive it. "We ask and have not, because we ask amiss."

A dying hour awaits us all; *and doubtless that is a season wherein faith should have its rigorous exercise*, if instead of finding death to be the king of terrors, we would embrace him, as the Lord's dismissal from labour unto rest. I pray you in the name of God, let it be Christ to you to live. I pray you in His name, to exercise faith on Him in all things; that when the hour of your departure cometh, you may know, in the unspeakable consolations of his love, whom you have believed; that you may commit, soul, friends, parents, children, and all dear to you, into his hands, as into the hands of your own watchful and faithful God: that you may say to those who mourn your loss, "*I die, but God will surely visit you:*" and as you close your eyes upon a wearisome and sinful world, may cry in the rich experience of faith, "*My heart and my flesh faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*" ¹

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 26

SERMON IX.

THE PERSEVERANCE, HAPPINESS, AND TRIUMPH OF FAITH.

HEBREWS XI. 8.

BY FAITH ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS CALLED TO GO OUT INTO A PLACE WHICH HE SHOULD AFTER RECEIVE FOR AN INHERITANCE, OBEYED; AND HE WENT OUT, NOT KNOWING WHITHER HE WENT.

IN the attacks of earthly enemies, two circumstances unite to form the difficulty of making a successful defence. When the onset is frequently made, and from many quarters, we know not whither to turn; and when the means of resistance are not in our hands, but must be sought for at a distance, the wound is given before we can obtain them.¹ One of these difficulties besets the Christian, in his warfare against the enemies of his salvation. Their attacks are many, and made from all the various

¹ Meztrezat Sermons de la Virtu de la Foy, IV. 136.

and unsuspected lurking-places, of besetting sins. But then the wisdom and goodness of God, have most graciously facilitated his means of resistance. One piece of armour may suffice to ward off every inroad ; and he has not to seek it from afar, in the hour of danger. He has it within himself ; and may use it at every moment of his spiritual conflict. That mighty and effectual portion of Christian covering, is *Faith*. It is the victory that overcometh the world ; the shield whereby to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked : and the Holy Ghost hath placed it, as a sure defence, before the hearts of all who “ *are his workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus, unto good works.*” ¹

The supreme importance of this master grace, has induced me to make it the subject of several discourses ; in order that we might see, how sure a guide, how safe a defence, how powerful a principle, to suit every possible circumstance of life, was possessed by Abram the friend of God ; and not by him only, as an insulated and solitary example of divine goodness, in which no other man's experience shall ever rejoice, —but as the common and covenant property

¹ Ephes. ii. 10.

of all, who being Christ's, are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

I shall now conclude this general view of the subject by some remarks,

· VI. ON THE PERSEVERANCE OF FAITH.

Profane history, both in its ancient and modern divisions, presents us with spirit-stirring examples of generals, who, having reached the land of their enemies, have burned the ships that carried them thither; in token that there was to be no retreat, and to show that there could be no safety, no hope, except in victory. The same histories inform us of nations who have left their own sterile country, to seek happier soils and climates: and being determined never to return, have taken with them all they had, and set their faces right onwards against all enemies, and all obstacles. Like their purpose, is the Christian's high resolve, when God hath called him to be a soldier, in the day of his effectual conversion. Having bucklered himself with the shield of faith, he must not remove it, while living, from his arm. Having drawn against his spiritual foes, that sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, he must no more sheathe it, until it shall be exchanged for the palm of an endless triumph. "He must

manfully fight under the banner of Christ, against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and must continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant to his life's end.' In this glorious warfare, the faith of the Saviour's followers is sustained by the might of his indwelling grace. Thus upheld, Abram went out from his home in Chaldea, at the bidding of Jehovah, a submissive and cheerful wanderer; though he knew not whither he went. Thus upheld, he did even more than this, in ready sacrifice of his own erring will to the perfect will of God. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:" because he looked for his final settlement far beyond the walls and towers of Canaan, near to some of which his tent was pitched, even to a city which hath foundations indeed,—a city, standing upon the everlasting hills of divine and immutable purpose in his behalf, a city whose builder and maker is God.

Truly, *if he and his family of faith had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.* There was time enough in which to retrace their steps to Chaldea; for

more than two hundred years elapsed between the call of Abram, and the death of Jacob. There were no external difficulties of considerable moment to overcome; nor was the distance so great, but that Abram well passed over and in after days Jacob performed the same journey with his staff. The children of Abraham by Keturah did actually go thither to dwell. But the land of idolatry and sin was never more looked back upon with desire. Nay, when Abram sent his servant thither to seek a wife among those of his kindred who remained there, it was with an express condition that Isaac should not go to dwell among them. “*And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the women will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou, that thou bring not thy son thither again. The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father’s house, and brought me into the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thee and thy seed will I give this land, He shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto thy son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be at liberty to return to thy kindred.*”

*from this my oath : only bring not my son thither again."*¹

Behold, the perseverance of a faith enkindled by the Spirit of God, within a believer's heart ; burning brightly there, to shew the soul its true interests ; and warming all its affections to pursue them, in simple renunciation of that unhallowed rest which it had for ever forsaken ! Such a faith hath no memory for the past, save only to keep in mind the unsearchable riches of salvation, whereby the sojourner was called forth from his abode of idolatry and death. Such a faith hath a fixed and steadfast eye, that can look only right onward ; and a patient will, that can stay God's appointed time, in God's appointed place, without one reigning backward desire of the heart. It is the act of the great Apostle, in the simple mindedness of his belief—*" Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*¹ From the moment when Esther was set apart for Ahasuerus, the time before she expected to be his bride was spent, not in repiningly looking

¹ Gen. xxiv. 5—9.

beyond the palace into which she had been taken, but in accomplishing the appointed months of her purification; that she might be presented to the king according to the custom of the realm. And thus do they, whom the glorious Husband of the Church calls us to his bride. They have one purpose, for which to live—that they may glorify Him in their bodies, and their spirits, which are his : and they have another purpose, for which to die, that they may be ever with the Lord.

Without visible right to a foot of land in Canaan, Abram continues to sojourn there. A famine drives him forth for a while into Egypt : but he returns to the place which God had commanded for his abode. The dislike and envy of the people cannot discourage him, nor make him partake their idolatries. War with the king of the land cannot terrify him there. Tried, tempted, and childless, he still holds his way ; and hopes in God against all appearances of hope : believing that God would give Canaan to his seed, when he was stricken in age, and when every day took something from the probabilities of sense, that he should ever embrace a son. Now this holy perseverance, is one of the most unequivocal featu

of gracious faith in the heart of a disciple of Christ. He knows himself to be a stranger ; and therefore has nothing to do but to pass with activity, diligence, and constancy, to the joys of his eternal home. He knows that he is a pilgrim and a wayfaring man ; and looks forward to his rest, with undivided attention of heart. He hath parted from sin, as a friend for ever ; and henceforth knows it in its reigning power no more ; but holds right onward to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Now whence hath the faith of God's elect its strength and fortitude, unto such holy perseverance ? Even in the promises of God, sure, stable, and inviolable, as they all are ; yea and amen in Christ Jesus, to the praise of their gracious Giver. He hath undertaken to uphold and strengthen his adopted children ; to guide them with his counsel, and after that to receive them to his glory. There is a constellation of promise glowing with the light of covenant love, and steadfast, in the firmament of covenant truth, filling the eye of faith with its brightness, and leading the believer's spiritual way—(the cross being the central pole star of all the radiant host) with certainty, constancy, and peace.—“ *They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion,*

*which may not be removed, but standeth fast for ever."*¹ "The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy upon thee." "As for me, this is my covenant, saith Jehovah, My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put into thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth."² "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good: but I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me."³ These are the full, free, and stable promises of an immutable God. They form, not only, as I said, the unchanging constellation of a Christian's joy, but also the munitions of rocks, wherein the perseverance of faith is placed by an Almighty hand. They are the sure anchorage

¹ Psalm cxxv. 1.² Isaiah liv. 10. Isaiah lix. 21.³ Jer. xxxi. 32; xxxii. 40.

of his hope, as he is enabled to plead them before God; and as the Holy Spirit of promise comes to him in answered prayer, “not as a wayfaring man that tarrieth for a night,” but as an inhabitant, to dwell within him, and to be the earnest of his inheritance unto the redemption of the purchased possession.

Confidence in these promises, through the abiding of the Holy Ghost, establishes the Christian in well-doing. The faith which unites him to Christ, upholds him in the way of holiness. Mercy, casting his sin into the depths of the sea, binds him to the God, whose pardon hath visited and saved him; and the more brightly the hope of salvation burns within him, the more steadfast will be his course. The hearts’ bias to sin will be deeply lamented; and strife against it encouraged. The preciousness of that rest, to which the compassionating Saviour invites every weary one, will be eagerly sought. Prayer will be earnestly made through that righteous plea wherewith the mediation of the High Priest above, hath furnished every comer to the throne of grace. And thus will the followers of the Redeemer be made more than conquerors, through Him;—“*thus will they be kept by the power of God, through faith,*

unto salvation." For the communication of this persevering faith, should every Christian's heart be lifted up. Learn, upon the Apostle's ground, and in his gracious confidence, each to say, "*I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"¹ And then, let the misinterpreters of this Scripture—the glorious climax of Christian happiness on this side the grave, say what they please, you will give the calumny its best refutation, by being "*steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*"²

VII. Here then is a page, whereon to make a brief record, touching THE HAPPINESS OF FAITH. And were the Book of God void of every other evidence of a believer's felicity, than that given by Isaiah, it were enough for the ground and nurture of every joy ;—" *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee ; because he trusteth in Thee.*"³

¹ Rom. viii. 38, 39.² 1 Cor. xv. 58.³ Isaiah xvi. 3.

But the *very exercise* of faith, so encouraged and upheld by the sure word of God's engagement, is a life of real and abiding happiness. How many of you, hath it placed again and again, in the brighter hours of its realization, upon a spiritual Nebo, in a clear pure atmosphere of gracious expectations and assurances; when your conversation was especially in heaven, and you were enabled to look round upon the mercies, with which you were encompassed, and the glory wherein they will be consummated! Did you not then stand upon your high place, like Balaam on that of Moab; and looking out upon your blessings and hopes, see but the uttermost part of them, and not see them all: but yet know that the invisible portion was immeasurably greater than all that could be seen and enjoyed, on this side Canaan that is above, dear and delightful as the earnest of them hath already been to your gracious experience?

The Christian can live by faith, without care for the abundance of this world's good. He has delights, in present communion with his heavenly Father, beyond all that the world can give; even if its whole surface could be changed into one Eden of delights, and the garden were

to be his own. He has the manna of a Saviour's body, and the spiritual refreshment of his blood, whereon to live: and while the world knows not the sweetness of the daily repast, the world's poorer and meaner portion is undesired. The gracious pilgrim, who seeks another country, that is a heavenly, (if he seeks it with all his heart,) will not be filled with disappointments and heart rendings, if others appear to have better accominodation than himself, by the way. He hath learned in whatever state he is, therewith to be content. True indeed it is, (and a proud stoicism utterly unworthy of Christ's Gospel, would it be to assert the contrary,) that "no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous." But then such trials are like mineral waters, nauseous it may be to the immediate and outward taste, but healing in their effects; and therefore cheerfully taken, when wisely and fitly administered by the physician. And thus it is, and thus only, that a Christian can "*glory in tribulation: knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Ghost given to*

him."¹ Faith, realizing the disciple's property in his Lord,—faith, realizing membership with his Lord's mystical body, assures him of an interest in all that Jesus hath : and therefore faith may well be satisfied, and happy, and blessed, with a less measure of present comforts, than—in the sickly desire to possess them, are continually haunting and mocking the hearts of those who have their portion in this life.

Abram sought not great things for *himself* in Canaan ; because greater things than those of earth's highest grandeur were his, as the friend of God, and the inheritor of a better land of promise. He sought not great things for his *children* ; for God, with all his goodness was also their portion. He was therefore willing, that Isaac and Jacob should dwell with him in the same lowly tabernacles, as partakers of the same glorious promise with himself. If they who have fully embraced the gospel, would often examine their goodly heritage, they would be more happy than they can be, by dwelling, as they do continually, for themselves and those most dear to them, within the dim, impure, and cloudy circles of fears, hopes, expectances,

¹ Romans v. 3—5.

and disappointments, which their mere earthly horizon embraces. If they would walk about the Sion of salvation,—if they would tell its bulwarks, mark its towers, and their own happy propriety in them, they would see a measure of beauty and abundance in this city of God, which would amply satisfy them : as it shall satisfy, but never satiate, the glorified of God through all eternity. And though, in regard of earthly comforts, “ *the fig tree should not blossom, neither should fruit be on the vines ; the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields yield no meat ; the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stalls : yet they would rejoice in the Lord, they would joy in the God of their salvation.*”¹ Happen what might, in personal or family experience, there would be blessing, and there would be peace. The prophet asked, “ *Is it well with thee, is it well with thy husband, is it well with the child ?* ” And the afflicted Shunamite answered in faith's right estimate of providential dispensations, “ *It is well.*”² Instead of being engaged in a continued and fretful quarrel with necessity, that is with the wise though secret

¹ Habak. iii. 17.

² 2 Kings iv. 26.

will of God, which must prevail over all human opposition, the faith of his children acquiesces in it; and they are filled with peace in this gracious submission of obedience and love. If a true follower of our blessed Lord watch over his faith, it will keep his joy, even a joy unspeakable and full of glory, until he receive the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul. But I pause. The field on which I have entered, is too spacious to be fully trodden. I would gladly have walked with you a little while longer in it, were I not called away to one part more of this wide and fair domain.

VIII. THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH.

The archers of a world's trials, and of the god of this world, may sorely grieve a trusting Christian, as they shoot at him; but his bow will abide in strength, and the arms of his hands will be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.¹ He will be able to reckon, with the sacred discrimination of Paul, "*that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in him,*"² when the King of Saints shall come and gather his elect from the four

¹ Gen. xlix. 23, 24.

² Rom. viii. 18.

corners of heaven, into the joys and felicities of his accomplished kingdom. Joseph's dungeon has light ; because he looks by faith beyond it. And Jacob, though halting with the angel's touch, will not let him go ; because faith is assured of the blessing. Job holds fast by God, and his faith conquers in affliction ; because it hath taught him to say, "*I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth : and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*"¹ Paul is tranquil amidst all the terrors of the storm : because he relies upon the promise that God hath given him his own life, and the lives of them that are with him in the ship. Surrounding evils are many and mighty ; but faith fortifies the heart against them, and overcomes them all. It embraces the absolute truth of all God's revelation. It makes personal application of all his promises in the Mediator. It hangs on his power, fidelity, and love. It turns from all other expectances of help : and is sure of finding the supply of every need, in the fulness of God. Therefore doth it challenge every enemy, and

¹ Job xiv. 25, 26.

triumph over every hindrance. Faith sees Christ a victor in every conflict: and knowing that they who are one with Him, vanquished sin by his conquest representatively, and are instated into the certainty of a real personal overcoming, it rejoices in the issue of the battle, while the battle is yet in progress. "*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him, against that day.*"¹ Faith hears the promise, "*When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee:*"² and faith, looking at the almightiness of the Promiser, and the truth of the Surety, gives its cheerful answer, "*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; thy rod, and thy staff they comfort me.*"³ The bow of the covenant is in the cloud: and while the rain descends, and the winds blow, and the floods beat, yet doth the Christian even then triumph, in the assurances of present safety, and of the early assuaging of the waters that surround him.

Jehoshaphat had made a covenant with the

¹ 2 Tim. i. 12

² Isaiah xliii. 2.

³ Psa. xxiii. 4.

king of Israel ; and therefore when Ahab asked him for help in the war with Ramoth Gilead, he answered, “ *I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses !* ”¹ And when the Most High is at peace with a man, by the blood of the cross, and the sense of that peace dwells within him, it is his privilege and his strength, and his safety, and his salvation, and the firm ground of his lofty triumph, that every thing which God hath to communicate, belongs to him, in Christ. Therefore will he not estimate his condition by present and visible standards ; but by his spiritual relation to the Eternal Trinity, and to those treasures of inheritance which are made over to the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore, as Abraham staggered not through unbelief, when the child of promise was long delayed, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God,—so a steadfast belief, upheld by the hand of the Holy Ghost, triumphs in looking, not at the things which are seen which are temporal, but at the things which are not seen which are eternal.

But the *futurities* of a believer far exceed all

¹ 1 Kings xxii. 4.

present enjoyments; and in them is the victory and triumph of his faith. He may be mean, despised, and hated by the world,—but faith shews him to himself, in the glass of the Gospel, and in the mystical body of his Lord, as a living member of his Church, arrayed with the garments of salvation; crowned with a diadem of glory; associated with the blessed community of the heirs of immortal life; and destined to bear his long-looked, long wished-for part, in celebrating the victories of the Redeemer, in that day, “*when He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.*” And when he looks upon the enemies of his soul from this eminence, he sees them indeed fallen beneath his feet. Then can he take up his parable, with a prelate of our English Church,¹ whose experience in the divine life surpassed even the mightiness of his theological learning, and say, “O my soul, the powers of hell shall not be able to stand against thee. They are mighty, and have all advantages of a spiritual nature of long duration, of place, experience, subtlety; yet this encouraging grace of faith is able to give them

¹ Bp. Hall's Works, VI. 370.

the foil, and to trample over all the powers of darkness. O my Lord God, do thou arm and fortify my soul with a lively and steadfast faith in Thee. I shall then not fear what man or devil can do unto me. Settle my heart in a firm reliance upon Thee : and then turn me loose to what enemy Thou please."

Such are the present triumphs of the life of faith ;—triumphs not to be wrested from the Christian,—triumphs that shall brighten around him, until the day when his earthly warfare being accomplished, he shall cry, "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me in that day.*"¹ What the eternal triumph will be, when the victorious Saviour shall call his saints to reign with Him in glory, the disciple of Christ, must be contented only darkly and dimly to anticipate. But the day will soon dawn : and then he will see them all, and know that they are all his own, in and with the glorified Head and Captain of his salvation in this holy war. Mean time let him go forward, wait, strive, pray, praise, and triumph.

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 7.

And, oh that every unbeliever, subdued by the sceptre of redeeming grace, fleeing to Jesus, from the curse and condemnation of a broken law, would be arrayed beneath his banner, and made partaker of his victory! For if these things be so, then is unbelief a dreadful state, and its portion an appointment of misery. It hath an awful character—"Without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world." *"He that believeth not the Son hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."*¹ Sodom was not more awfully endangered by its pollutions, than Capernaum by refusing Christ. Let no man therefore, in whose hand the Scriptures of salvation are providentially placed, imagine, that if he be free from the guilt of sensuality, and a lover of the order, moralities, and charities of life, but yet turns his back upon Christ, in contempt or indifference, he shall escape the judgment of God. The mere formal words of prayer from infidel lips can no more enter the ear of God, than the unbelieving Israelites could enter Canaan. Unbelief is the fountain of all sin; and the bitter waters flowing from it are unto death. As faith purifies the heart; so infidelity fills it with iniquity.

¹ John iii. 36.

As faith works by love to God ; so unbelief lives in a dreadful atmosphere of hatred towards Him. It turns away from the only possibility of victory over sin, and union with Christ Jesus, without whom fallen man can do nothing. It makes a league with the enemies of God ; and rejects the sinner's only Friend, in order to obtain this dreadful peace. It repels and repudiates every promise and denunciation of the word of God ; and if He be not believed, then faith must be exercised in the assurances and seductions of Satan ; for man can have no other object of trust and confidence, than He is who "so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life : " or than that lost Spirit, whose business of unceasing malignity it is to ruin men, soul and body, for ever. Unbelief then, changes, if I may so speak, the devil into a God ; a liar from the beginning into an utterer of unerring truth ; and the truth of God into a lie. Is unbelief then a state, in which a man, with death, judgment, and eternity before him should abide one moment, while Christ, and all that He hath may be that man's by faith ? Judge ye.

SERMON X.

ABRAM'S ENTRANCE, AND WELCOME INTO
CANAAN.

GENESIS XII. 6, 7.

AND ABRAM PASSED THROUGH THE LAND UNTO THE PLACE OF
SICHEM, UNTO THE PLAIN OF MOREH. AND THE CANAAN-
ITE WAS THEN IN THE LAND. AND THE LORD APPEARED
UNTO ABRAM, AND SAID, UNTO THY SEED WILL I GIVE THIS
LAND.

“A CHRISTIAN is one that believes things his reason cannot comprehend; hopes for things which eye hath not seen: labours for that which he knows he shall not obtain on this side the grave: yet in the issue, his belief is evidenced to be true; his hope makes him not ashamed; and his labour is not in vain.”¹ Such a follower of God was Abram; and such, in an eminent degree, his paradoxical experience.

¹ Lord Bacon's Works, Vol. vii. p. 21.

Such is the experience of every spiritual descendant of Abram, in a greater or less proportion. *"His life is hid with Christ in God."* The secret sources of his spiritual being lie deep, infinitely deep, beyond the reach of any estimate of them, which the men of this world can form. His consolations are equally far out of the sight of all carnal observation; and his whole walk seems to involve contradictions, to those who judge after the sight of the natural eye, and the hearing of the natural ear, instead of forming their opinions by the unerring rule of the Holy Volume, which teaches, that however rough and thorny the believer's path may be, he has joys which a stranger doth not intermeddle with, and that as his *"sufferings abound for Christ, his consolations also abound by Christ."*¹ This very important truth is simply unfolded in the history of Abram. Having therefore closed for the present the digression, which it appeared necessary to make into a consideration of the mighty principle of faith, which upheld him in all difficulties, made him more than conqueror in trial, and solaced him, by the immediate presence of the Comforter in

¹ 2 Cor. i. 5.

all his afflictions,—I proceed to examine his more immediate history, as a full and unquestionably practical exhibition of the power of faith. I notice then,

I. HIS ENTRANCE INTO THE PROMISED LAND.

Ur of the Chaldees, and Haran itself were now left behind; dear as one naturally was to him, as the land of his birth and early attachments, with all that tenderness wherewith the heart dwells upon its first recollections; and fondly as he would think of the other, from being the last earthly resting place of his father Terah.¹

He went forth, however, from both, to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan he came. But here perhaps the father of the faithful may be met in his way of God's bidding, with a sceptical objection. Where, it may be asked, was the advantage gained to Abram, even in a spiritual point of view, by leaving Chaldea, wherewith to counterbalance

¹ Jewish tradition, reluctant to admit the possible error of the national ancestor, held that Abraham had first openly declared his hostility to idols; and thus rendering himself the object of persecution, was at once led from Chaldea by the Divine Voice, and driven by the popular resentment.—Judith v. 6. Dr. Croly's Divine Providence, p. 308.

his privations, and the sacrifices which his departure would demand from himself, and from those whom he left behind? The promised land whither he went was a strong hold of idolatry; while the recollection, and some practice, of a more pure worship still existed among his kindred in Mesopotamia. (Joshua xxiv. 2.) His removal therefore was an exchange of superstition; and left the balance, on that, as well as on all other accounts, in favour of his own country. But the difference of situations was immense; and the wisdom of his covenant God was not less gracious, than unerring, in demanding this removal. Abram was *at home* in the country of his own previous idolatry, among his kindred and in his father's house. He lived in it as his element, as the place of his proper rest, the home of his heart and desires, as well as of his family. But he is *a stranger, a pilgrim, a wayfaring man* among the superstitions of Canaan, and the dishonour done by its inhabitants to the holy Jehovah. With them he had no participation, no sympathy, no communion. He passed through all those abominations, and defilements, as some rivers are feigned to pass through lakes, into which they fall, without any intermixture with the waters

around them. And what is this, except a Christian's new and gracious state, when the hour of his conversion has arrived, and he is thenceforth called in the manifestation of God's love to him in Christ, to "obey from the heart that form of doctrine which has been delivered to him?" He is still in the world; still encompassed with its dark, and foul, and flagrant idolatries; and he must needs go out of the world, before he can escape them. He must still breathe an atmosphere that teems with moral pestilence. He must still have his neighbourhood amongst men sunk in the love of present things; where hands without number are employed in raising idols of earthly worship, and hearts without number are upholding their rivalry against God in Christ Jesus, and saying unto them, "Ye are our gods."

If the Christian be indeed to separate himself in every civil transaction from the wicked; from those, who, whatever be the peculiar character of their besetting sin, do, by clinging to it, commit a dreadful unfaithfulness against the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, and against the incomparable preciousness of his Atonement and Righteousness, then he must needs go out of the world. He can per-

form no duties, fulfil no relations, make good no obligations, out of all those, wherewith his heavenly Father hath bound him to his family, his country, and his fellow men. He must even surpass the morbid and mistaken sensibilities of those, who notified to the eyes of an unbelieving world, the corruptions of our early Christianity, by burying themselves, far from all the ordinary associations and charities of humanity, in the depths of the wilderness, and dwelt a life long of perverse abstraction in caves of the earth, or on the top of lofty pillars; often, however, less lifted up, on these pedestals, than on their own pride and self-complacency. But when a man hath learned from his effectual teacher, the Holy Ghost, “*to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord,*”¹ he hath no longer fellowship with his former idolatries. His conversation is no longer in the world, but in heaven. The chain of slavery, that bound him to earth and earthliness, is broken; and being risen with Christ, *he seeks those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.*² The world is a believer’s home, not one moment after he

¹ Rom. vi. 11.

² Colos iii. 1.

hath been shewn the glory of his Saviour, the beauty of salvation, the holiness of Christianity, the purity of God, and the example of Christ, as the object of imitation to his Church, as well as its light and lustre. While he lay in his death of trespasses and sins, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, and whatsoever was not of the Father, but of the world, were the delights and resting places of his heart. But when faith hath led him to the cross, when faith hath brought home upon his heart the sense of union with his Redeemer, when faith hath opened the inlets of his affections, and poured a full tide of grace, the unsearchable riches of redeeming love upon them, then is the world crucified to him, and he to the world. The believing view of this Saviour makes a full, final, and eternal divorce, and that too a willing divorce, between his disciples, and the land and associations of former idolatry. He is not of the world, even as his Lord was not of the world. He walks as in an enemy's country. He is a weaned man; no longer conformed to the world, but transformed in the renewing of his mind. His outward position may be much the same as it had been before he embraced the Gospel; but how

mighty the difference, both in the secret desires, hopes, fears, conflicts, joys, and consolations of the inward man of the heart, and in the outward acts of daily life! Now he cries, as he sees the world in rebellion against its Saviour, the slave of sin, or the idolater of a legal righteousness, and equally under the wrath of God for all, "*Woe is me that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech, and to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar.*"¹ Like Abram by Sichem, or Lot in Sodom, his righteous soul is vexed: and while its holy sympathy is out-poured unto his Father, who is in heaven in behalf of the spiritual suicides around him, so desperately encouraging each other in the work of self-destruction, he flees to God for himself, shuts the door about him, in holy communion with his all-sufficient Portion, and there, and there alone, hopes to find, and as he becomes familiar with his place of rest, to experience, a peace, which the world can neither give nor take away.

Here then is the real test, here the infallible touchstone, to ascertain the nature and character of your spiritual state, not as it is before man,

¹ Psalm cxx. 5.

but as it is before Him, who knoweth the heart and trieth the reins. Your profession of attachment to Christ crucified is not intended to carry you away from the post of duty in the world; as a momentary influence of unworthy fear led Elijah to flee from Ahab and Jezebel into the wilderness, where God found and reproved him; but it is meant to separate you from all kindred and connexion with sin, with unbelief, with the spirit of a reigning earthliness. It is intended to make you exhibit the image and superscription of your heavenly King among his enemies; to shew the impress of his hand, in the beauty of holiness, wheresoever you go; that men may take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus. It is designed to make you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; and to testify, not merely to the existence but the victorious power of an indwelling Saviour and Holy Spirit, in stemming the tide of irreligion and ungodliness around you. Your faith calls you to stand upon the sure foundations of the word of God, like those who have tried, not only its truth, but its preciousness, as it brought you by the Holy Spirit's blessing to Christ; and upon this stable ground to exhibit the

reality of a consistent spirituality, and godliness of life ; “ *that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*”¹ If this be the stamp of your Christianity, the life of God is in it ; and the life of God is within yourselves. If it be not, you may have a name to live, but you are really dead. You may have professed to leave the Chaldaea of idolatry and unbelief ; but you have merely changed the name of the country, while the superstitions are the same. Nay they are more dangerous, more deadly than before. The heart’s utter idolatry is still cherished, and only hidden beneath the fig leaves of a Christian profession. “ *The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.*”

(2.) Abram was now within the country whither he had been directed—even the country of divine promise. *But the Canaanite was still in the land.* It had belonged to Shem in the providential distributions of the earth among the sons of Noah, when the world was to be renewed ; but accursed Ham had usurped it from the race of the promised seed, and though an unchangeable blessing was in it, yet was it

¹ Matt. v. 16.

filled with sinners, whose crimes were daily provoking the God of heaven. Here then was an especial trial of Abram's faith ; and his circumstances are remarkably typical of those, in which every child of light must walk, until his earthly pilgrimage be well and safely passed—until “*an entrance be ministered unto him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*”¹ The Canaanite is still in the land. That faith, which is now the law of the Christian's new and spiritual being, hath as effectually severed him from his former condition under the curse of the law, and the covenant of works, and the condemning power of sin, as the axe of the executioner separates the man, on whom it falls, from natural life. But the power of sin is not slain ; the assaults of sin are not taken away ; the inward pollution of the old man wars against the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness ; having made an alliance with the God of this world, and with its temptations from without. His soul still must dwell among those who are enemies to its peace. He has indeed, as a believer,

¹ 2 Peter i. 11.

already entered into rest. He has the gracious repose of an intimate and mutual affection between the Saviour and himself, in that ineffable union which has been wrought by the Holy Ghost. He rests from dread of the covenant of works, from which he is now, as I said, for ever separated. He rests from the defiling reign of sin, which must no longer have dominion over him, as he is not under the law, but under grace. He rests from that dreadful cause of apprehension, which the word of God hath suspended over the head of every unbeliever. He hath free and full justification from all his sins by the blood of atonement: and therefore he hath peace with God. He is no longer under the Spirit of bondage; but if he hath graciously learned to plead his privileges in the covenant of mercy, he may come with holy boldness to the throne, in the Spirit of adoption, not as a slave, but as a son, crying Abba Father. Nevertheless, he hath not reached "*the rest that remaineth for the people of God.*"¹ He must yet expect the enmity of the inhabitants, among whom he sojourns; while he abjures all portion in their iniquities. He will know little of his

¹ Heb. iv. 8.

state and altered relation to the children of this world, if he should be disposed to marvel that they hate him. Without will be fightings against his peace; and within will be fears, from the malice of the tempter, and the peril of his snares. The sad conviction of besetting sin will often disquiet him, and break his tranquillity for a time.

But the neighbourhood of the Canaanites would raise Abram to a better and a higher hope, by shewing him that the substance of God's promise lay far beyond the land, and would keep him watchful, self-denying, abounding in prayer, and fleeing unto God for help: as those same Canaanites, in after days long served to exercise the courage of the Israelites, and hinder their swords from rusting within the scabbards, so do the onsets of temptation, and the deceitfulness of the heart, serve to exercise its graces. A broad line of separation is drawn between the renewed and better desires of a Christian's spirit, in its covenant with God, and the temper of a world, secure and delighting in its enmity against Jehovah. He dwells even in the land of promise, amidst its privileges and blessings, as one who knows that he has here only the foretaste of future happi-

ness; the full and everlasting feast being reserved till that time. when he shall enter into the joy of his Lord. To the perverted ambition of those who have their portion in this life, its poor seductions resemble the mess of pottage of profane Esau ; for which, in their incontinent hunger, they are willing, ready, eager, impatient to surrender a heavenly birthright ; while the Christian, faint it may be with his opposition to surrounding idolatries, will yet refuse to go to the world's cisterns. Nay, when some comfort, that seems to have more of lawfulness and purity within it than others, solicits him to partake it, a holy jealousy will often discover a snare and a stumbling block in it, and oblige him to reject it at once ; as David, in his holy self-denial, would not drink of the water of the well, which was by the gate in Bethlehem, lest he should bring sin upon his soul. Thus, the very trials of the land become a portion of that universal machinery, which works together with unceasing motion, and unswerving regularity, for good, to them that love God. Thus, the world's hatred, the oppositions of inward tendencies to evil, and the multitude of invading temptations, become instruments of the Saviour's love, because they lead, as the Spirit of

God overrules them, to Him who delights to be solicited for his effectual help. If any are experiencing the stern conflict between nature and grace, dwelling in the land of a present salvation, and of promises bright with the glory of an everlasting joy and peace, they may well take comfort to themselves. The sentence of God is already denounced against the accursed Canaanite; and it shall be in good time put into execution. The enemies whom they now see, and beneath whose fiery darts they groan, being tempted, they shall see no more again for ever. Placing themselves in calm, but steadfast opposition against sin—placing themselves upon the highway of gracious duties in the might of the Spirit of God, the warfare, however stern, will soon be ended. And when they shall be joined to the company of those blessed and holy ones, who have part in the first resurrection, “*the Canaanite shall no more be among them, in the house of the Lord.*”¹

II. I proceed to say a few words upon ABRAM'S WELCOME INTO THE LAND OF CANAAN. *The Lord appeared unto him.* Heretofore God had promised in the inviolability of

¹ Zech. xv. 21.

his truth, to *shew* the land wherein his servant must abide ; but now He engages to *give* it to his seed. The day of gracious communications brightens around Abram, as he proceeds in the way of duty. And thus it will ever be. *If any man will do the will of the Most High, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.* There may be hitherto only a glimmering of gracious light, a day of small things in experimental religion, apparently hardly sufficient to guide you onward. But remember, that when you go at God's bidding, and in the spirit of devoted obedience, you are journeying towards that quarter of your gracious horizon, in which the Sun of Righteousness will soon arise upon you, with healing in his wings. The promises will unfold and expand themselves in daily increasing beauty ; and fill you with enlarged joy, as they become more clearly defined to the eye, and better understood by the heart and apprehension of your faith. That word of promise, the declaration of eternal purpose, which to-day saith, " I will *shew* thee the land ; " shall to-morrow speak more fully, and say plainly, " I will *give* it thee." Your "*path* " as ye look upwards and tread onwards, "*shall be like the shining light, which shineth*

*more and more unto the perfect day.*¹ God will appear unto you. The plain, the oak of Moreh, and the place of Sichem, will be verified in your experience; and like Abram, and like Jacob, you will have your Bethel, and your visions of sure, unchangeable mercy.

But in what form, it may be asked, was this manifestation of Jehovah made? Again we conceive the glorious visitant to have been the Essential Word of God, before his Incarnation, thus rendering Himself visible to Abram's eye; coming thus, as if to compensate in some degree for the early darkness of that covenant of grace, wherein the friend of God was instated, and to be the glorious herald of its future brightness: coming thus, to shew him, a more close approximation, as it were, of mercy to him, in the person of its great Depository:—coming, that he might thus more clearly rejoice to see the day of the Son of man:—coming, as it were, to connect that gracious season of Abram's experience, with his own human advent; with his death in Abram's nature; with his resurrection in the flesh; and ascension, in that glorified body to the right hand of God, as one with

¹ Rom. iv. 18.

Abram's seed, and one with God their common Father.

‘ Whether, in the first instance, the angel of Jehovah visibly revealed Himself to Abraham, or whether He only spoke to him with an audible voice, we are not positively told. But the phrase in this place plainly imports, that he beheld Him with his bodily eyes. Now if Abram *beheld* Jehovah, we may be sure that what he beheld was the Word, or the Angel; for by this Being only has Jehovah ever manifested Himself. But the ordinary form, under which the Angel appeared, was that of a man. The natural presumption therefore is, that the patriarch then saw Him, under that his wonted figure.’¹

And are not revelations essentially similar made of Himself by the Saviour to his brethren, in the conflict and tribulation of their warfare against sin? When otherwise their hearts would faint within them, does not He draw nigh, and breathe on them with the Spirit of his consolations, and say, “*Receive ye the Holy Ghost,*”² as your strength and comfort? Are they not welcomed into the land of promise,

¹ Faber's *Horæ Mosaicæ*, II. 58.

² John xx. 22.

not merely with the voice of God rejoicing over each, "*This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found:*"¹ but in such communications of love, such supplies of spiritual strength, such an inpouring of spiritual peace and joy to their hearts, as serve to convince them, beyond the gainsaying of the infidel, that God is among them of a truth?

The Canaanites saw not the Lord when He appeared unto Abram. And if the man of God spake to them of his mercies in such a revelation, they would have probably denied his word, and scorned him for an enthusiast. But was the visit of the Eternal Word of God less real to him, because of the unbelief of Canaan? Abraham's experience and happiness testified to the contrary. Ye, to whom such high, and honourable, and gracious fellowship is a stranger, may hold it to be the mere dreaminess of the mind, ; its misjudged wanderings into speculation; the unreal inhabitancy of its own creation; the fitfulness of imagination uncontrolled by the sobriety of a chastened judgment. But this is not the case. I appeal from you, as incompetent judges, to those who have gone

¹ Luke xv. 32.

forth from their idolatry at God's bidding, and as the love of Christ constrained them, when they felt its power in their heart of hearts. They will tell you, that they have thus a witness within themselves of that mysterious union with the Lord, which is the root of all holiness within them. They will testify, that from the communion which their Lord makes with them, in the infinite condescension of his grace, they are raised above temptation, and strengthened for hours of trial, and gifted with patience quietly to wait upon God, in the discharge of duties, and amidst all discouragements.... They are thus in the world, as the bush in Horeb, burning with fire, but not consumed. They thus know the good-will of Him who dwelt in the bush. And when they have risen from prayer, or gone forth from the chambers of holy meditation, in which these visits of love have been vouchsafed to them, and wherein God hath lifted up the light of his countenance upon them to give them peace, their arms have been strengthened to grapple with Satan, and to wrestle with sin; their loins have been girded about with truth; their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, to run the way of all relative and social duties, in

a heavenly mind ; and to live above the world. In fact, these tender communications of Himself, and his love, made by the Redeemer to his disciples, while yet in the earthly land of promise, where his undertakings in their behalf have only a beginning, though a most happy one, are the food and fuel, if I may so speak, of all experimental religion. If we would enter into its rest, Christ must be revealed unto us, in the glory of his person, and the infinite fullness and suitableness of his Almighty deliverance. Then only shall we enter into the divine freedom of the Gospel, and be willing to live supremely unto God. Come forth then, as the word of life calls, and the Holy Ghost enables you, from the land of your idolatries. And then, from the time when you once set your feet within the limits of the kingdom of God, in the full purpose of your hearts, shall you have visits of his presence, tokens of his goodness, and deep persuasions of his faithful promises in Christ Jesus, whereby you shall be led in bonds of love. You will have the dearest and the mightiest of all impulses, by which man's heart can be solicited towards that kingdom of the saints, wherein the sceptre of Immanuel shall govern a realm untroubled by a single rebel-

lious thought, and his subjects themselves, kin
and priests unto God, shall enjoy their Sa-
viour's presence without a cloud, and in th
glorious union obtain the fulness of joy that
at God's right hand for evermore.

SERMON XI.

THE TENT AND THE ALTAR.

GENESIS XII. 7, 8.

THERE BUILDED HE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, WHO APPEARED UNTO HIM. AND HE REMOVED FROM THENCE UNTO A MOUNTAIN ON THE EAST SIDE OF BETHEL, AND PITCHED HIS TENT, HAVING BETHEL ON THE WEST, AND HAI ON THE EAST : AND THERE BUILDED HE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, AND CALLED UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD.

THE gracious and happy correspondence with heaven, enjoyed by Abram, as the friend of God, was commenced very early in his pilgrimage of faith; and continued with increasing closeness and endearment unto the end. He had no sooner entered within the land of Canaan, and seen the character of those among whom he was called to sojourn, than the Lord appeared unto him, gave him welcome thither, and promised to bestow the country upon his seed, both as a real and typical possession. That act of condescending love was immediately acknowledged by a most decided exhibition of

holy gratitude, and an ample pledge of future devotedness. There builded he an altar unto Jehovah who appeared unto him.

This spiritual reciprocity between God and the soul, forms the law and happiness of Christian life. A more important subject than that which it involves, cannot possibly be laid before our minds. If we are to look at the *tent* of Abram, as the pattern, whereby to form our own domestic arrangements, in the spirit and power of his simple faith, we must also adopt his *altar*, as the model of our family devotion. Nay, I am entirely persuaded, that where personal religion exists at all, in the reality and power of God's life-giving Spirit, there will be not only a strong desire, but a gracious determination, among those who rule in families, to acknowledge Him in social worship: even as David returned, not merely from the ordinary duties of his high station, but from the most sacred of all employments—that of bringing back the ark of God, to bless his household.¹ May that adorable Jehovah who is not only the God of the spirits of all flesh, but the God who setteth the solitary in

¹ 2 Sam. vi. 20.

families, attend us with his grace, and enable us to profit by this inspired record of his faithful servant's domestic zeal and love! I propose therefore, to direct attention to **THE IMPORTANCE OF A FAMILY ALTAR**, as erected to the honour and worship of Jehovah by the father of the faithful.

I. IN A GENERAL VIEW OF THE SUBJECT.

It is man's dearest privilege, as well as his highest duty, regarding himself with relation to God's revealed gospel, that he should connect all the circumstances, periods, duties, trials or enjoyments of life, with that adorable Being whose he is, and whom he ought to serve. Thus did Abram; and thereby he enhanced every providential blessing; found every affliction lightened; and dwelt habitually in heaven. This gracious association, was the golden thread that ran through every part of his conduct, and connected it in a beautiful and harmonious whole with God's will, and therefore with his own highest happiness. It was the opening act of his arrival within the borders of Canaan, and thus,

(1.) *He took the most fitting and sure possession of the promised land.* When the navigators of modern times have been providentially

directed to countries, before unvisited and unknown, it has always been their practice, to unfurl the banner of the prince who sent them forth, and for whose honour they were employed; and to take possession of the new discovery in his name and for his service. In this manner some of those places, which in times past have been, and some which yet form the most important settlements of Great Britain, have been attached to its crown, and made to form part of its empire. In some instances an act of religious worship has formed part of this ceremonial; but it is sad to think that Protestant England, has been in these respects surpassed by the followers of the Church of Rome. The earlier servants of God had a better mode of entering upon the possessions, whither his divine providence had led them, and in which his undeserved goodness had instated them. Thus, when the ark rested upon Mount Ararat, and the waters passed away from the face of the earth, Noah came forth from his refuge, at God's bidding: and the first act, whereby the gracious thankfulness of his soul had its manifestation, was to build an altar upon the soil, still wet with the waters of the deluge; to take of every clean beast, and of

every clean fowl, and to offer a burnt-offering on the altar. God's blessing followed this grateful act of a devotion, which his own Almighty grace had inspired. "*The Lord smelled a sweet savour, or a savour of rest; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done.*"¹ Even so did Abram. God had lately *shewn*; and now the same faithful God had *given* him Canaan. In what manner therefore doth he take seisin and possession of this heritage, made his own in the absolute freeness of mercy? He builds no lofty tower upon the plain of Moreh, whose top should reach to heaven, as did they of Babel. He takes not advantage of the mountain, whither he afterwards removed, to erect a dwelling, which might be seen far and wide to his honour. He does not enter upon his heritage, by building and occupying a house; as if that measure, were the establishment of his claim in the most befitting manner. How then doth he possess Canaan? Even before the tent is pitched—even before any accommodation is provided for himself, or those around

¹ Gen. viii. 20.

him, he builds an altar unto the Lord who had appeared unto him. God's gift to him, God's welcome, as he enters upon the gift, must both be acknowledged. So did David in after times. "*He swore unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob, Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed, I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.*"¹ It was even a heathen practice to build a temple, while the walls of the city rose around it; to connect these outward defences with the sanctuary, by cords, and so with the false deity who was supposed to inhabit it. And we can be placed in no circumstances, where the divine glory is not the first point, towards which our minds should be directed. The all-wise Prophet of the church has taught us what should lead, and what should follow in our prayers. "*Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*" These are the first petitions wherewith to seek the throne of grace; and then we are commanded to bring thither those

¹ Psalm cxxxviii. 2-4.

which concern our own temporal and spiritual need. And why? Simply because the glory of God in Christ, as the Father of the redeemed and elect Church, is the great point of convergency to every desire of its members, when their eyes are opened to know that glory in redemption. And as those desires tend thither, they carry with them the assurance of heard and answered prayer, for every other subject, on behalf of which it can be exercised.

Abram *pitched* his tent, but *built* his altar. When it was needful to provide himself with shelter, a frail covering suffices for the pilgrim of a day, who must live as a wayfaring man. But the honour of the everlasting God demands more pains, and more stability for the place of his presence. And if it were thus indeed with ourselves; if having food, and raiment, and houses wherein to live, instead of being so anxious that they should be ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion, we were more fitly solicitous to raise the altar of family religion; to give our main care and effort to the glory of God; to establish his worship, not merely individually within the dwellings of our hearts, but unitedly within the walls of our habitations, there would be a high and fruitful state of pri-

vate, public, national religion among us, which now we cannot see. Our luxurious selfishness can only thus be corrected. Only thus can we escape the reproach, which should be as bitter, as it is alas, well deserved, of seeing our own spiritual barrenness in evangelical holiness and blessedness, compared with the spiritual fruitfulness of those, who served God in the earlier ages of his church, and on whom, the dew of his blessing was so abundantly poured from the fountain of the Eternal Spirit. How delightful, how happy would be the spectacle, if every mercy put into our hands by God, were regarded as a first fruit of the promises made by his free love in Christ Jesus, whether for body or soul, for ourselves or those most dear unto us; and so were sanctified by the word of God and prayer! It would indeed be well, if we and they were dedicated to Him. And if we always took possession of a new habitation, by erecting God's altar within it: we should thus link it to those designs of unchanging love, which give to the children of salvation all present dispensations, as parts of their abiding heritage in the covenant of love, sealed and made sure by the blood of Christ.

But the instances of this holy dedication are

rare among us. Who shall say, that while he has entered upon a new habitation, even after having made every provision for bodily comfort, that art could devise or his resources furnish, he hath not forgotten to bring God within his doors; to provide for his worship, and to make a solemn surrender of the whole settlement, with all hopes, desires, and anticipations attached to it; that it might be employed in promoting the honour of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the universal Sovereign of the Church and of the world? Contrary instances are afflictingly numerous, of those who professing to worship God, professing to depend upon his providence, and to seek the salvation of his Gospel, enter upon their houses, and upon their inheritances, to lie down and to rise, to go in and out, to eat, to drink, and to be filled with abused abundance, no more recking or regarding God, who gives this plenty, than the sheep, when they go with the eagerness of mere animal instinct to their fold, or the herd, when they seek food and fodder in their stall. The ox indeed knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Jehovah, man's Lord, Maker, and Provider, man's Saviour and only Hope, hath been compelled to say to his professing

worshippers, "Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." "*They know not that I gave them their corn and their wine, and their oil, which they prepared for Baal.*"¹ "*The tabret, the pipe and wine are in our feasts; but we regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.*"² Were the altar however, erected to the worship of God, as the first and immeasurably the most needful duty of every man, when he enters upon a new habitation, and a new sphere of obligations—were the spiritual worship of Jehovah, made the first connecting act of every providential appointment with Himself and his glory, then might it be hoped, on sure and scriptural ground, that there would be a soul, if I may so speak, in the body of every temporal mercy. Every spiritual blessing, would come with an infinite addition of sweetness poured into it, by the presence and manifested love of God in Christ.

(2.) *A family altar was an important requisite in, or near the tent of Abram; because it acknowledged the great doctrine of an atonement for sin.* When Noah, as we have seen, built

¹ Hosea ii. 8.

² Isaiah i. 12.

an altar upon the earth, which, according to divine command he was to renew, to replenish, and to possess, he offered sacrifice upon it unto the most High God. The same significant rite had been long before practised by Abel ; and, almost beyond doubt, by our first parents, when the fall and ruin of mankind had been conceived and brought forth, by their rebellion against their Maker ; and with it the necessity of a vicarious atonement for sin. There is no fact more notorious, upon the testimony both of profane and sacred history, than that of the notion, almost universally entertained by Jews and Heathens, before the advent of our Lord, that the displeasure of an offended God, was to be averted by the sacrifice of an animal ; and that to the shedding of its blood they imputed their pardon and reconciliation. Now upon what principle is this wide spread belief—coeval with the world's history, to be explained? The practice of animal sacrifice did not obtain from reason ; for no reasonable notions of God, could teach men that He could possibly delight in blood, or in the fat of slain beasts. Nor can it be said, that we have any natural instinct to gratify, in spilling the blood of an innocent creature. Nor could there be any temptation

from appetite thus to act; when the whole sacrifice was consumed by fire; or, if it was not, when men wholly abstained from flesh as their food. In fact, the destruction of innocent and useful creatures, is evidently against man's nature, his reason, and his interest. Every view we take of sacrifice, as a human appointments seems to involve us in the most serious and inextricable difficulties. Sacrifices, therefore, must have originated in an authority, of which the influence was as powerful, as the practice was universal—that is, in the authority of God, the Sovereign of the world.¹

The sacrifice of Abel, is in itself a strong, if not an invincible argument, that the rite was instituted by the Most High Himself; and had by consequence, a typical reference to some future and nobler offering, which should be made to Him by blood. That sacrifice could not have been acceptable, save by divine appointment, according to the obvious maxim of all true religion, "In vain do they worship God, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Abel, therefore, must have worshipped God in vain, if his sacrifice of the firstlings of his flock

¹ Magee on the Atonement and Sacrifice, Vol. II. Part I. p. 28, see Hallet in Magee, p. 43.

had been either his own invention, or the command of his father Adam. But it was accepted of God, who testified of his gifts: and therefore the point is settled. Indeed, God Himself appears to have commanded Adam after the fall, to shed the blood of innocent animals, and to consume the whole, or a portion of the flesh; in token that the worshipper's sin deserved the punishment of death, even the death of an everlasting destruction to body and soul. Yet that mercy had provided a way of escape in the pure sacrifice of Him, who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, as a full, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation, and Satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Abel came in faith, thus looking unto Jesus the universal Propitiation for sin, and its infinitely efficacious atonement. He sought mercy in the blood of the Lamb of God; his faith was accounted unto him for righteousness; and he had this testimony, that he pleased God. Such had been the sacrifice of Noah: for when God smelled the savour of rest, and pronounced the blessing, it was not for the blood of bulls and of goats, with which, in its abstract worthlessness, his wrath could be appeased, or his blessing obtained; but as it typified the blood

of Christ. Of the same nature was the purpose, for which Abram built his altar in so many instances:—first in the plain of Moreh, then upon the mountain near to Bethel; next in the same place, after his Egyptian sojourn; afterwards in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron; not to mention the grove, which many years later he planted in Beersheba, where he called upon the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.¹

Abram's eyes had been already opened by faith to see something of the glorious person, and mediatorial work of that promised seed, in whom he and all nations of the earth were to be blessed. That altar therefore, was not made for mere thank-offerings, or expressions of submission to providential arrangements. It had a higher, and a more blessed reference. It was

¹ 'Abram built his altars, not unto God, whom no man hath seen at any time, but unto the Lord who appeared unto him; and in all the accounts which we have of his prayers, we find they were offered up in the name of this Lord. Thus, at Beersheba, he invoked, in the name of Jehovah, the Everlasting God. (Gen. xxi. 33.) Our English translation very erroneously renders the place, "he called on the name of Jehovah:" but the original expression never signifies to call upon the name; but to invoke in the name; and seems to be used where the true worshippers of God offered their prayers in the name of the true Mediator; or where the idolators offered their prayers in the name of false deities.'—Shuckford's Connexion, I. p. 293.

meant, as the victim bled, died, and was consumed by fire upon it, to bring Abram and his family before God as sinners, righteously condemned, having no hope of escape in themselves, and no quarter of the world, and no arm of man, and no device of angel, whither they could turn with the least expectation of deliverance, from the deserved wrath of the Most High. It was meant to testify on his own behalf, and on behalf of those around him, (professors of the same worship, and followers of the same God,) that he looked to one source of help and hope ; that he beheld by faith " the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world : " and cast himself, and his soul, with all its sins, and all its need of mercy, upon that blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth from all sin. Whenever a revelation was vouchsafed to him, and in every place where he sojourned, we find him building an altar to Jehovah ; thus marking the importance which he constantly attached to the instituted rite, whereby the great sin-offering and atonement were prefigured. These altars exhibit Abram's persuasion of the great scriptural maxim, known and felt as containing the germ, and essence of all redemption, revealed to, and recognized by the faithful, that "*with-*

*out the shedding of blood is no remission."*¹

The building of an altar, was a profession of faith, the rehearsal of the patriarchal creed. The act of sacrificing, was virtually the prayer of our church, wherein we say in language, second only to that supplied by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, 'O Lord, the only begotten Son Jesus Christ, O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.'² In such a spirit did the patriarch Job intercede for his family. "He rose up early in the morning when the days of the feasting of his sons were gone about, and offered burnt-offerings, according to the number of them all; for Job said, "*It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.*"³ And in this acknowledgment, consists the very first element of all true and acceptable family worship. The altar of prayer, which may be set up, without a full and unreserved confession of family, as well as individual guilt, and without a reference to the needful atonement of Christ upon the cross, in order

¹ Heb. ix. 22.

² Biddulph's Theology of the Patriarchs, II. p. 119.

³ Job i. 5.

to bury the guilt, and wash away the stain of sin for ever, is not the altar of scriptural requirement. God will have no respect to it : and the offerer's soul will be defiled with the additional pollution of iniquity, even in holy things.

Superstition, may build an altar after its own form, dedicated with no more of the zeal which is according to knowledge, than the Athenians inscribed that which Paul saw "To the Unknown God,"—and superstition may make such offerings, as its own delusions have imagined fitting : but these are altars and sacrifices, not made to the Most High, for pardon through the propitiation of Christ ; and therefore they are mere erections of the heart's idolatry. They are the Pharisees' proud self-worship in the temple. They are the blind and the lame, out of the flock of a complacent persuasion of self-righteousness. They are mere cold confessions of obligation to God, for bestowments of providential good. They are any thing and every thing, except the sacrifice demanded by Jehovah,—a confession of sin, an acknowledgement of the righteousness and justice of everlasting death upon the offender's body and soul, for his transgressions ; and the laying of a believing, clinging, clasping hand upon the head of the victim,

who bore the tremendous burden of a world's sin upon the cross, and died for its redemption. But that altar, whose erection God will bless in every family, is the altar, where He is sought by the new and living way into the holiest through the blood of Christ. Faith cannot stir one step towards God with hope, except it first sees the sprinkled mercy-seat, and book of the law; and feels the worshipper's heart sprinkled also with the atonement of the cross.

Here then, is the mirror wherein to examine our family religion,—if indeed family religion, be not altogether a stranger to our habitations, if we are not living without God in the world. Have we learned that great and momentous doctrine of atonement, so early revealed to Abram, and so familiar to the whole gracious and happy experience of his life of faith? How do we assemble around the family altar? Merely as dependants on God's providence, or as the needy and urgent petitioners also, for the rich blessings of his pardoning grace and love? Are our hearts so subdued by the sin-convincing Spirit of God, so truly cast into the depths of conscious guilt before Him, so fully and awfully persuaded of the light in which his absolute purity, and the righteous administration of his

perfect law places sin, and those who commit it,— (that is, all men who ever lived,) as to know that we must plead for mercy, and not challenge the reward of justice, on the ground of personal obedience to the law? Or are we without this sense of guiltiness, this conviction of a sinner's rightful portion from an offended God? Do we come to Him in the way of scriptural approach; taking refuge in the atonement, and resting every hope upon the preciousness of our Lord's death and passion? Or, do we come with the solemn mockery of a worship that merely owns a God of providence, but sees Him not as an avenger of evil, and yet as laying upon his own Incarnate Son the iniquity of us all? Cain was the first infidel that built an altar, and offered upon it to the Lord; and because he offered not vicarious blood, and would not admit his need of the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, his oblation was rejected. Similar oblations have been presented before God, in the philosophical infidelity that denies atonement; thrusts God in Christ Jesus who made it, from his own work of unimaginable love in redemption; and denies the whole doctrine of the cross, as a doctrine of ignorant superstition. When we build the altar, whether in our

personal or family religion, we must take that one simple, massive, unhewn stone,—the tried and sure Corner-stone, already laid by Jehovah in the Zion of his Church,—“*God purchasing the Church with his own blood.*” We must begin, continue, and end every approach to the mercy-seat with his propitiation. We must bring that purchase-price, with all its unimaginable merit before the throne of God; and we shall find it to be indeed the royal seat of tenderness and love. We have then, an open door to the Father’s heart and the Father’s grace. While sin remains upon our souls, we can make no acceptable approach to a holy God, whether in individual or family worship. Jesus Christ came to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Go we then, and lay our transgressions upon Him. Then may we use the altar as an altar of incense in prayer. Then may we use it for our thank-offering of gladness, as reconciled unto God by the expiation of his Son; prepared to ask in filial assurance of hope, according to his will; and knowing that He will hear us, answer us, and bless us, among that great and happy congregation of his saints, “*who shall have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*”¹

¹ Revelations vii. 14.

SERMON XII.

THE IMMEDIATE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY RELIGION.

GENESIS XII. 7, 8.

**THERE BUILDED HE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, WHO AP-
PEARED UNTO HIM. AND HE REMOVED FROM THENCE UNTO
A MOUNTAIN ON THE EAST OF BETHEL, AND PITCHED HIS
TENT, HAVING BETHEL ON THE WEST, AND HAI ON THE
EAST; AND THERE HE BUILDED AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD,
AND CALLED UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD.**

It is not only one of the many, but one of the most dangerous methods, in which the spirit of darkness and delusion, brought by original sin upon the mind, works against the salvation of men, that it will allow them to admit a general rule of conduct, in the length and breadth of its requirement, but yet to produce reasons, why it may be transgressed in the objector's peculiar circumstances, or so modified and diluted in the obedience, as to become a mere

dead letter, and mockery of the living reality. Now, as we partake the common lot of a fallen humanity, so we are not exempted from the common delusion. Its very extent and peril, are however reasons, why the spiritual watchmen of our Zion, as they take their rounds over her battlements, and ascend their towers of affectionately jealous observation, to examine where the enemy of the city of God makes his most fierce or most subtle onsets, should put the inhabitants upon their guard, awaken the slumberers to watch and pray, lest they enter into temptation; and bid those who have a name to live, while they are dead, arise and call upon their God for mercy. It must not therefore suffice, to have shewn something generally of the momentous character of that awfully neglected duty of *family worship*; and there to break off, as though the bare mention of it were enough. Some persons may admit the truth of the preceding remarks. There may be a voice awakened within some heart to say concerning what has been already stated, "*The word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.*"¹ And yet such an individual may be turning round

¹ 1 Kings xvii. 24.

upon that secret pleader, and adding, as some fancied hindrance presents itself to his mind, "*Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*"¹ I proceed then to notice,

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF A FAMILY ALTAR TO THOSE WITHIN THE TENT.

Amidst the many considerations that press upon the mind, as soon as the all-important subject is brought before it, our difficulty must be, not to embrace the overpowering whole; but to select a very few of the most simple and obvious, lay them before you, and pray that God's Almighty Spirit may write them in power upon your hearts. It may therefore be observed,

(1.) *That the duty of family worship is a necessary deduction from the very first obligations of personal religion.* So long as a man is contented to live, as though there were no reward for the righteous, no God that judgeth in the earth; so long as he loves darkness rather than light, unbelief than the faith that brings salvation, with its glorious author to the heart: so long as a man is both suppliant and idol,

¹ Acts xxiv. 25.

worshipper and deity to himself, it would be a mere and absolute contradiction to expect, that his mind should open to the claims of family religion. Such an interest would involve as great a moral contradiction, as it would be a contradiction of natural laws, that a stone thrown into the water, should make the remote circles strong and well-defined, while there was no vibration of the surface in immediate contact with itself. But when the Holy Ghost hath touched the man,—when he has learned the misery of sin, and the preciousness of a Saviour,—when salvation in Christ hath been revealed to him, and he knows that he is not his own, but bought with a price, and must therefore glorify God in his body, and in his spirit which are God's, the obligations of *relative* as well as *personal* religion must be bound strongly and abidingly around his heart. Then he can hardly remain ignorant that he is concerned with God, concerned with his Redeemer, concerned with the Holy Ghost, in every circumstance and duty of life, social as well as personal: and that the word of God, which he has taken for the lamp to his feet, and the lantern to his paths, instead of the miserable and conventional code of the world's

morality, has rules for every relation, and connects him, with all his family associations, to the awful responsibilities of eternal judgment, on their behalf, as well as on his own.

If indeed it were possible that men should live in a state of the most absolute independence, one of another, like the beasts of the field and forest, then each individual, having no sympathies with those around him, would owe them no observance of duty and love. But as the God of providence hath united his creatures together in families, every member of a household is the link, as it were, of an electric chain: and the subtle current of godliness or ungodliness that flows along it, must have an influence upon all. “*Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.*”¹ How then is it possible, that when the Most High is revealed within the heart, as a God of grace, speaking peace to it by the blood of Christ, and shewing, by the Spirit’s operation, the necessity of each individual working out his salvation with fear and trembling, it should not be considered a sacred duty, to teach the same gracious necessity to others, bound to that

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 26.

converted soul, by the dearest and strongest of all human obligations and sympathies? When Moses had steadfastly set his face towards Canaan, he said to his father in law Hobab, "*We are journeying towards the place, of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you; Come thou with us, and we will do thee good.*"¹ When Jacob was commanded to go unto Bethel, and build there an altar unto God, who had appeared unto him, he said unto his household, and to all that were with him, "*Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments; and let us arise and go to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress; and was with me in the way which I went.*"² When the Holy Ghost overruled the heart of Andrew to follow his Lord, as a true disciple, he first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, "*We have found the Christ.*"³ This also did Philip, when he had been called of Jesus, act towards Nathanael. A personal reception of the truth of God unto salvation, and a heart so insensible to the claims of family obligation, as to neglect

¹ Numb. x. 29.² Gen. xxxv. 2, 3.³ John i. 41.

the erection of an altar for family worship, appear to be irreconcilable contradictions.

It will not surely be said, that public worship has made such a provision unnecessary; and that the religious instruction of a family is needless. Sufficient it never can be, in the very nature of things. The ordinances of God's house can never, (humanly speaking) reach the young, until their minds are informed, in some degree, concerning the nature and infinite importance of spiritual truth. If all communication of the human understanding with the Bible and the God of the Bible be thus cut off, within the walls of our houses;—if prayer be never made within them, who can expect, (even if it were possible to suppose that the sinners in this case should desire it,) that hearing the word, or public supplication at church, should be made profitable to them? Parental instruction in the things of God, being moreover, a duty of the law of nature, arising out of a revelation of God, and of man's relation to Him, as the Sovereign of the world, could not have been set aside by the appointments of any stated and official teachers, living beyond the limits of the respective families, and sacrificing beyond the offerings upon such domestic altars. “*These*

*words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."*¹ The very fact, that God has instituted family relations, and at the same time expressed his will that religion should be continued in the world, has, by linking these two acts of his providence and mind together, given a proof unquestionable of the absolute duty of family religion. The knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom He would send in the fulness of time, was to be preserved in Abram's family. In him, and in his seed were all nations of the earth to be blessed. How then was that blessedness to be communicated? How was that most gracious and glorious revelation to be preserved, except Abram should keep it alive by family instruction and worship? Did he then go forth from Chaldea alone? No: he took his household with him. Did he leave them in ignorance, to perish in unbelief of the future Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world? No. Did he leave Jehovah

¹ Deut. vi. 6—9.

to work a constant miracle for the preservation of that blessed truth whereof he had been made the depository, while his own family might be the means of handing it down to their posterity, and so onward, until the consolation should be manifested in human flesh? No. Did he leave the dwellers in his tent to have a godless communion with the idolaters of Canaan; while he only remained to bear a sad, and probably a fruitless testimony against their abominations? No. What then did he? He led his family to the family altar. And I am utterly unable to see upon what ground an objector can stand, who would assert, that Abram's duty was not our duty; and that its blessing will not be our own. I know not how the inference is to be avoided, that God has appointed families to be nurseries of holiness; and therefore, that family religion is an obligation, as imperative as the personal service due to Him from every one who expresses a hope of redemption from sin, and of his mercy unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ.

In addition to these considerations, there are daily cares, occasions, and necessities. There are family sins to be bewailed; family errors to be reformed; family mercies to be acknow-

ledged; family wants to be supplied; family undertakings to be blessed; family afflictions to be sanctified; family dangers to be prevented. Is God obliged, by any necessity, under which we have laid Him, to make provision for these, and for much more than these? Or must that provision come from the fulness of his grace in Christ Jesus; and should it not be sought in family prayer? How is it that the God of this world so blinds the eyes of men, as to lead them to expect, that any blessing should rest upon their families, when the eternal fountain, whence all blessings flow, (bearing with them, unless our very blessings are to be cursed, the tincture of the cross) is forgotten and defiled? Is it not, moreover, amazing, that men should own the duty of public religion; and yet continue without God in the intercourse of the family? Is it not a strange—bear with me if I ask—is it not a monstrous contradiction, to acknowledge that *different* families should assemble in the house of prayer, to honour God; and yet that members of the *same* family should never draw around its head, that he may lead, and that they follow into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, at their own home? If the heathen had their household gods, for whom

they provided honourable places in their dwellings; if Laban and Micah had their idols and teraphim, shall there be no shrine in a professing Christian's tent, as well as in his heart, for that glorious and invisible God, who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth?

Let it never be said, that these instances of idolatry cannot be brought to bear upon us. What is idolatry, except perversion of religion? And doth not this very perversion imply the truth, and therefore the obligations of a religion, which hath the infinitely wise God for its author, and his glory in Christ Jesus for its end? If God therefore hath revealed Himself to us in his word, and we refuse Him the honour of family worship, which yet dark and foul idolatry pays him under some of its absurd or tremendous mistakes, shall not these miserable heathens rise up to condemn us? "*Woe unto thee Chorazin! woe unto thee Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they would a great while ago have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.*"¹

(2.) Again, the importance of the family altar is testified by that new and better law of

¹ Luke x. 13.

intercourse, which it establishes among those within the tent.

Formerly, Abram and his family had been partakers with the idolaters of Chaldea; and all their relations to each other had been formed and conducted upon principles, very considerably, if not mainly, idolatrous. Now however, a complete change had been demanded, and wrought. The very erection of the altar was a sentence of divorce, read between Abram's family and the surrounding superstitions, with all their dishonourable tendencies against the glory of Jehovah. The patriarch, his dependents, his friends, his relatives, had been thus, in outward act at least, removed out of their sphere of darkness, and made to revolve around the Sun of righteousness, the central Light of everlasting life. The idolatries that defiled all the land of Canaan, were now only as a pressure from without, serving, as the riches of Almighty grace overruled them, to bring those within the tent nearer to each other, in the true faith of salvation, and nearer to each other in the love of God. Jacob, as I have already observed, no sooner resolved to erect the altar at Bethel, as the God of Bethel had bidden him, than he put away the false gods, and

buried them under the oak by Shechem; that there might be no member of his family, whose heart should be turned away from the Lord God, by having them before his eyes.

There was an appointment among the Jews and proselytes, that every family, province, and city, should observe the feast of Purim, as a memorial of deliverance from Haman's conspiracy. In like manner should Christian families, celebrate the great and mighty work of deliverance from the terrors of the everlasting death. And when such celebration is daily made, in a household approach to his altar, by the indwellers of the tent, as restored sinners, saved from the curse, and brought into the family of God, the new and happy relation is acknowledged, and all its depths of mercy sought, in this endearing freedom of children pleading with their Father who is in heaven.

When the altar is raised in singleness and simplicity of heart before God, the household where it stands, is placed in godly opposition to the surrounding current of sin. And while it is sweeping others away into whirlpools of transgression and unbelief, where they may be engulfed for ever, the worshippers at that altar have an anchor of the soul both sure and

steadfast. Family religion dedicates every
 not to the god of this world, but to the
 heaven. It inscribes every vessel, the
 and the small alike, with that expressive
 "*Holiness to the Lord;*" instead of that
 each had previously borne—"A son
 wrath." It changes the name of that tent
 Bethaven, the house of vanity: to be
 the house of God. It makes the Christi
 ther and mother, snatch their children fr
 fire, into which they once had the heart
 them, as sacrifices, of all others the mo
 natural, to the Moloch of this world's
 pleasures. It gives them in full surren
 Him who bought them with his life upc
 cross, and who still cries "*Suffer the littl
 dren to come unto me, and forbid them not*
 exercises a wonderful and happy alte
 upon all the relations of domestic life;
 all the charities and duties that arise
 them; and connects them all with God, i
 ward profession; even before converting
 shall have effected the alteration from a
 festly godless, to a spiritually praying
 It places them, not only in the eye of Go

¹ Matt. x. 14.

in the eye of each other, as beings gifted with a reversion of immortal life, as fellows in sin, and in God's condemnation, all equally needing the laver of that fountain which hath been opened for sin and for uncleanness. It obliges them to regard each other, as embarked on the same voyage, not merely for a little time, but for all eternity. And the Scriptures, read, explained, and pressed upon their hearts, point them, as they were pointed before, to God, as the common Father of all his adopted children; to the Prince of Peace, as their reconciliation;—to Him and his fulness, as their portion; to his service, as their freedom; and to his everlasting kingdom, as their final and glorious home.

Until the altar be erected, and praise and prayer offered in the family, there can be no efficient check upon family sin; and upon the sins of individuals who compose the indwellers of the tent. Human authority can never exert a mightiness capable of reining in the headstrong course of family iniquity. God, his law, his redemption, and the constraining love of Christ, must be the "cords of a man, and the bands of love," whereby relatives, children, and servants must be withheld from forsaking the guide of their youth and the covenant of their

God, and from wandering in the ways of the destroyer. Such wanderers alas, there have been, in families where the God of salvation was owned and sought; and many sighs, and many tears, and much broken heartedness, and earnest wrestlings with God for the visitations of his converting grace to the offenders, have they wrung from mourning and almost disconsolate parents. But, if divine sanctions fail of success, it is merely the dreaming of unbelief and ungodliness to expect that human precaution, authority, solicitation, will avail to stay the headlong course of such rebels against the majesty of God, and the sanctities of family love.

Consider also, the different aspect which the house of God would bear, if all the families who visit it, came from the family altar to that of public incense. It would be contemplating a bright and happy picture, full of light and loveliness, to see a church assembly, composed of individuals, issuing from their chambers every morning, to worship God in their domestic fear and love of his holy name—each bringing from his closet to family prayer a heart fitted and prepared by divine love, to share it and enjoy it. They would betake themselves

to the house of public solemnities bearing the impress of communion with heaven ; as the face of Moses shone with light, when he came down from conversing with God in the mount. They would carry the love of the Saviour with them into church ; and hearts much enlarged by the spirit of grace and supplication, to seek and obtain all the blessings which He waits in the sanctuary to bestow. Then would the places of our solemn assemblies be indeed houses of prayer ; and God, even our own God would bless us. As the case now stands, we come into the sanctuary with little feeling that God is there : because if we have sought Him at all in the closet, we have not in very many instances, it is to be feared, sought Him in our families, nor prayed there, that the Holy Ghost would attend us to church ; and that God would satisfy us with the goodness of his house, even of his holy temple. Let me beseech you therefore, in the name of our families, in the name of our common Lord, in the name of his house, (which, were we praying families would be a house of supplication, and therefore a house of praise for heard and answered prayer) to consider what I say ; and may God the Holy Ghost, give you a right judgment to act accordingly !

(3) I can now only glance very slightly, at *The Importance of Abram's family Altar, with reference to the blessing of God, upon himself and his household, as a community of believers.* His wife was a distinguished partaker of his faith in the Son of God; so were Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; and the Church of the Redeemed was embraced within the circle of his descendants for nineteen hundred years. When Sodom and Gomorrah were to be destroyed, the Lord opened his purpose to the father of the faithful; thus giving him an opportunity of pleading for those guilty cities. And why? "*I know him,*" said Jehovah, "*that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.*"¹ It is well pleasing in the sight of God that masters and parents should walk in the steps of Abram; and He delights to pour blessings upon them in rich effusion, when they thus imitate the father of the faithful. The holy education of your families will be a fitting discovery of your love

¹ Gen. xviii. 19.

to God; and He will joy and rest in the acts of his love to you. If ye will seek the spiritual good of your households, and the glory of the God of their salvation, in bringing them instrumentally to the experience of his saving love, you and yours shall feel the emphasis of that gracious promise—“*They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble : for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.*”¹ I do not mean to affirm that God doth in all instances make the dew of that Spirit to rest upon every individual within the tent where a family altar is erected. This would suppose Him tied and bound to houses, as heathens chained their idols ; or as Eli’s sons dared to imagine, that the God of the ark necessarily attended the ark of God. But such is the usual process of his love ; and such the delightful encouragement of his promise. “*The Lord will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great.*”² And surely they look abroad with little attention, who fail to see, that He does really diffuse the riches of his love, where an altar is raised to his honour :

¹ Isaiah lrv. 23.

² Psalm cxv. 12, 13.

just as, while the ark abode in the house of Obed-edom, "*the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that he had.*"¹

"Every creature is good, if it be sanctified by the word of God and prayer:" and this mark put upon all our domestic plans and procedures is the mark of God, which He will never fail to acknowledge. While the Jews failed to own Him, and pay their vowed and bounden duty in the temple, all their wealth was put into a bag with holes. They went to the corn floor for twenty measures, but there came forth only ten; and to the wine press to draw out fifty vessels, and there were only twenty. But when once they began to build the ruined house of Jehovah, the promise was put into act,—"*From this day will I bless you.*"² It is even thus in the family. While God's house is suffered to be in the dust, and we think not of Him, his salvation, his righteous claim upon our family devotedness, nor of our dependence upon Him; while indeed He is forgotten and despised, must there not be the canker, and the caterpillar, the palmer worm, and the locust of divine displeasure, even in

¹ 1 Chron. xiii. 14.

² Haggai ii. 19.

our temporal expectations, as well as that leanness of soul which his curse conveys, and which starves it, in the midst of overflowing bounties and prosperities? “*Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.*”¹ Abram’s tent had the altar, and therefore it was a Goshen of light and peace; while Canaan around him, whatever might be its natural fertility, as a land flowing with milk and honey, was in spiritual darkness, even darkness that might be felt; and in spiritual barrenness, that brought forth only thorns and briars of idolatrous superstition. So will it ever be in the tabernacles of the righteous and the wicked. The voice of joy and salvation will be in the one; while all that can speak true peace and happiness to the heart will be silent in the other.

I shall not indeed be slow to grant, that misfortunes assail, not merely unbelieving households, but also those families where God in Christ is sought as a portion, listened to as a preacher, rested on as an atonement, and obeyed with holy and delightful love, as a Sovereign. I know that it is often thus. But shall I

¹ Psalm cxxvii. 1.

admit this, as a reason why He doth not bless those households that long for, and live upon his grace? This be far from me, as from one whose office it is to vindicate the ways of God to man. Unless indeed it can be shown me, that the burdens of Israel were as bitter as the plagues of Egypt; unless it be proved, (as infidelity may be defied to prove,) that God's chastenings to his children, are as dreadful as his judgments upon the wicked; I will never believe—and not believing, God forbid that I should encourage others to think so unworthily, of Him who is the covenant God of every spiritually praying family, that He does not put a decided difference between those who call upon his name, and glory in his service, and turn away such as in their miserable unbelief, from the obligations of family worship, and condemn not only themselves, but those whose best interests should be bound around their hearts, to the multiplied evils of alienation from God and his salvation. The saint and the sinner, may have the same ingredients to outward sense, wrung into the cup of each; but the difference is immense. The one hath his portion in love, the other in wrath: the Red Sea, the waves of which were the same, did

offices vastly different for Israel and Egypt. It formed a way for Jehovah's ransomed to pass over, and it overwhelmed his enemies in a destruction, from which there was no escape.

The family of Abram was secure from all attempts or devices of the idolatrous Canaanites; for the altar of God was among them; and from its horns, not all the might and enmity of the land could drag them. While the tribes of Israel went to their worship in the holy city at the appointed feasts, Jehovah drew a wall, as of fire, around the land; and no enemy was ever known to cross its borders. It will be ever thus in those families where the Redeemer is loved, honoured, and served by its members, not only as individuals, but as households. Their enemies, and Satan the chief of all their foes, may go round the battlements seeking entrance, to devour and to destroy; but the mountain on which they stand, the mountain on which their houses stand, the everlasting hill of divine love, is full round about, and shining, (as the eye of faith's assurance can discover,) with horses and chariots of fire from the Lord, their shelter and defence.

I close this subject for the present, with one word of remembrance. In the very place, even

in Bethel, where, probably, Abram built his altar, or at least very near to it, God afterwards appeared to Jacob in his hour of sorrow and temporal destitution. There did Jehovah renew the covenant with this saint of his church; there cheer his soul; and there promise never to leave him, never to forsake him. Bear this gracious history upon your hearts, ye who are anxious that your houses should be among those where the name of the Lord is invoked. Your family altar may be a blessing, an unspeakable, an inconceivable blessing to your children's children, when your bones are mingled with the clods of the valley. As Jacob, speaking of God, calls Him *The fear of his father Isaac*, so may those who shall come forth from your loins, rise up to call your memory blessed; and looking to the Eternal Three, to the saving knowledge of whom, in Christ, you may have instrumentally led them, may say, "*He is my God, and I will prepare Him a habitation; my Father's God, and I will exalt Him.*"¹

¹ Exod. xv. 2.

SERMON XIII.

THE MORE REMOTE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY
RELIGION.

GENESIS XII. 7, 8.

THERE BUILDED HE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, WHO APPEARED UNTO HIM. AND HE REMOVED FROM THENCE UNTO A MOUNTAIN ON THE EAST OF BETHEL, AND PITCHED HIS TENT, HAVING BETHEL ON THE WEST, AND HAĪ ON THE EAST ; AND THERE HE BUILDED AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, AND CALLED UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD.

WHEN a country is overspread by enemies, who have taken possession of the greater portion of its surface, and are doing it mischief at their pleasure, those fortresses and strong holds which still resist, are peculiarly important. They not only protect the brave and loyal men whom their walls contain, but serve also as refuges and rallying points to those who would escape the common bondage, and make war against their enemy, under the banner of their lawful sovereign. Such a castle is every holy

example, in the midst of that spiritual tyranny, with which Satan has subdued the world. The Christian lives at peace in the high tower of his salvation, Jesus Christ. "*When the enemy cometh in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him,*"¹ for the protection of holy believers; and they are as cities set on a hill, which cannot be hid, to discover, whither all may flee, and where all may be happy in the same Almighty refuge. It was thus with Abram, in the land of Canaan. The altar, which was to him as the Shekinah of the God of the altar, was the defence of his tent, and of those whom it contained. That altar served, moreover, as a beacon in the midst of the dark and destructive sea of idolatry, which had overflowed the country of promise. If the power of divine grace should influence any of the people to flee from wrath, and join the people of the God of Abram, the altar directed them whither to go, and what to do. Nor can it be known, until the world's whole history shall be fully disclosed, in the awful valley of final and unchangeable decision, how many idolaters in Canaan were saved from the wrath to come, by the influence of Abram's altar, and

¹ Isaiah lix. 19.

the blessing of God upon it, as the instrument employed for their conversion. We have seen something of its value to those *within* the tent. I would now conclude the subject by noticing,

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY RELIGION
IN REFERENCE TO THOSE WITHOUT THE TENT.

I am anxious to declare what every day's experience impresses more deeply and vividly upon my mind, that any religion, whereby God is to be honoured must be *an inflexible profession*. The Saviour's faith is disgraced, and men's souls are terribly endangered, when we would attempt to allure them (as it is said) into godliness, by bringing the pure and heavenly gospel of Jesus Christ as near as possible to the world, and casting a gaudy dress of earthliness over the severe simplicity of its form; thereby thinking to make it more attractive. The worshippers of earth, and time, and sense, whose carnal minds are enmity with God, are thus allowed either to believe, that they may have discipleship with Jesus, and yet not undergo that entire conversion of heart, of which his unchanging word declares the necessity; or else, that religion itself is a mere name, instead of the most solemn and sacred of all realities. But our Redeemer's disciples are not of the world,

even as He is not of the world. And therefore, if you profess the faith of Christ crucified, it must be seen by your firm stand upon the ground of spiritual religion, that they who would partake your salvation must deny themselves, and take up the cross, and follow Jesus. Never attempt to disguise the cross. For if you do, He, in the diadem of whose mediatorial honour, that cross is the highest jewel, will confound the attempt, and say to you, in some well-merited and stern rebuke, as He said to Peter, who would have dissuaded Him from suffering for the world's redemption. "*Get thee behind me Satan; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*"¹ It is utterly impossible, that you should ever be too anxious to save the lost and dying souls around you, plucking them as brands out of the fire. But if you are to prosper in the attempt; never conceal nor compromise by your own conduct, the requirements of the gospel: never omit your bounden duties God-ward, in compliment to the world's prejudices. It is only by a bold unswerving confession and worship of God, in all times, all circumstances, and all companies, that you can

¹ Matt. xvi. 23.

expect those whom his Spirit calls to life eternal, to give Him honour on your behalf, when they have learned his preciousness. Thus only, will their lives exhibit that steadfastness of faith which has its foundation on the Rock of ages, as displayed by you, when they behold your good conversation in Christ. It is a wretched sight, over which to mourn indeed, when professors of the gospel, unwilling, as they say, to terrify others from embracing its salvation, omit their duties, or perform them in a careless manner, before worldly persons; largely exhibiting the tone of worldliness, as if they were ashamed of God; and then, think they have done Him service by the lukewarmness. This conduct is the mere cloke of their own worldliness—it is the insincere correspondence of their own hearts, with the enemies of God in that land which they profess to have forsaken; and his blessing can never be expected in the hypocrisy.

From these remarks two particulars arise, intimately connected with my subject, which I pray God to bless, as we consider them.

(1.) *That family worship is a duty, which a Christian owes to God, that thereby he may do honour to his heavenly Father, in the sight of the world.*

In his relative position, I hardly know a more important light, in which a disciple of the Lord should regard himself, than as called upon to bear a constant testimony for his divine Master; as that Saviour witnessed a good confession for him, and for the whole Church, at the bar of Pilate, although He knew the death that awaited Him, for the testimony. Among Christ's glorious titles, it is not the least distinction, to be "The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness," to testify the nature, truths, and holy purposes of his Father, his Spirit, Himself, and the common salvation which they had provided for man, in his obedience and death. Neither will it be the least blessedness of his brethren, in that great day, when He shall receive them to Himself, and place them upon his high and glorious throne, that they have confessed Him in the midst of an adulterous and sinful generation. Ye then, who would indeed follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, through evil report and good report, never rise from your beds, without remembering that He expects you to be his witnesses through the day; in order that men may take knowledge of you, not only that you have been with Jesus, but of the high and holy

munion which you enjoy with Him. Thus answer the question, Who is on the Lord's side? Thus "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Now the family altar is one of the most plain and unequivocal witnesses to be exhibited by a believer that he serves the Lord Christ, and has consecrated not only his individual self, body, soul, and spirit, but his household, his family, all his concerns, and all his relations in life, to the high and sacred obligations of that gracious calling.

When the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, returned to the land of their allotted possession in Gilead, they built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to.¹ The children of Israel, jealous lest this act should be one of departure from the true faith, sent Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten princes, to remonstrate against what appeared an apostacy from the God of Israel. They also prepared war against them for the delinquency. But the suspected tribes fully justified themselves, de-

¹ See Joshua xxii. 10.

claring that the altar was set up as a testimony of their relation to, and worship of the same Jehovah, with their brethren on the other side of the river. Therefore they called the altar ED; because it was a witness between both parties, that Jehovah was the common and only God.

Now this is the Christian's duty. It is his obligation to have an altar in his house, to show that he and his family have, and desire to have, gracious communion with those families who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; and that they are all one in Him. But then that altar must serve a double purpose, like the altar in Gilead. It must be both as a testimony of unity in the faith with the Church of Christ, and also as a pledge that they who worship at it, have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, with the infidelity, the covetousness, the profaneness, the cold and cheerless latitudinarianism around them. The tent must have its inscription to the Lord's honour plainly recognizable by those without. "*This is the House of God;*" as well as that which is written by the finger of the Spirit, upon the hearts, and souls, and practices, of the family within. If Abram had not built his altar, the Canaan-

ites might have been more friendly disposed towards him ; but the God of his mercies would have been provoked. And therefore, although he dwelt alone, he did not hesitate thus to cleave to, and acknowledge the Saviour, in whom he had been graciously taught to trust. Elijah was alone upon Mount Carmel, while the prophets of Baal were four hundred and fifty men ; yet did he not scruple to stand by the Lord's altar, and had a blessing from heaven upon his bold testimony for the truth of God, against the idolatries of Israel. When the Saviour took our nature for its salvation, and with it a conflict against the powers of darkness, He was alone ; yet He desisted not from his work ; and in his glorious victory have all the members of his mystical body gained an everlasting triumph. Even so should it be with his disciples. They may be alone in their neighbourhood, as worshipping families ; but He will be with them, and the Father will be with them, and the Holy Ghost will be with them, and the whole glorious Three will confess them before men. What then should be the Christian's declaration, as he turns him amidst the scoffings, (it may be,) of surrounding irreligion, to worship God in his family altar, in

gracious approach by the new and living way into the Holiest? "*All people will walk, every one in the name of his God; and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.*"¹ What should be his resolve, whether under the silent contempt, or the rampant scorn of an ungodly world? "*Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*"² "*Daniel,*" in heathen Babylon, "*went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled down on his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God,*"³ as he did before the decree was passed, which made this act of his religion a sentence of death against himself. This acknowledgment of God could hardly have been secret and closet prayer; but rather the worship of his family in the sight of those who sought his life, and whose malice he feared not; because his heart was occupied with a gracious reverence for the God of his mercies, and the only hope of his salvation.

Wheresoever the duty of family religion is neglected, there is an unacknowledged, but not on that account, a less terrible position, occu-

¹ Micah iv. 5.² 1 Joa. xxiv. 15.³ Dan. vi. 10.

pied by the neglecter, for propagating irreligion to future generations. Your descendants, who thus offend, may and will plead your example, and quote it as the miserable defence of their own family atheism. *Where* the tide of infidelity and sin, thus set free by you, may be staid; or *whither* it may bear those for whom you ought to watch, who shall say? Jeroboam made Israel to sin, many generations after he was gone to his own place.

The building of the glorious temple on Mount Sion, went quickly forward; because the stones were quarried, squared, polished, and fitted in the mountains; and the cedars were felled, sawed, and prepared upon the heights of Lebanon. Both were thus ready to be laid in their places, when brought to Jerusalem, and men wondered at the progress; for there was no sound of saw nor hammer, as the building rose in its majesty and beauty. It would be so to the honour of God, in the edification of that Church, which Jesus will present in Himself, a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, provided the spiritual tabernacle were built up in the same manner as the material temple in Jerusalem. If the portions of the mystical building were prepared, as

Almighty grace blessed domestic worship, how glorious would be our church assemblies ; and how beautifully, and how rapidly would the spiritual temple, grow up in all things unto Christ, who is its Head, to the manifest honour of the Eternal Trinity ! If family worship also, were universal or even general through the land, and the great Council of the nation, Lords and Commons, were to assemble, as the hereditary and chosen representatives of its vast family, with the impress of domestic worship fresh upon their hearts, it would be absolutely impossible to give one moment's admission to the monstrous and mischievous sentiment, that religion has nothing to do with plans and policies, involving the interests of one hundred and thirty million of immortal beings. A sentiment, virtually, if not in words, the same with the decrees of infidel France, when its legislators put it upon record, as the law of their country, that death was an eternal sleep, and that there was no God in heaven. The public prayers, with which a sacred wisdom on the part of our forefathers, determined that the momentous deliberations of Parliament should commence on every day of its sitting, would then become, as they ought to be, a

blessed opportunity of asking, and a blessed ground of expecting, the favour of Almighty God upon them, for an issue tending to the common good, and to his great glory.

(2.) *Family worship is also a duty which the Christian owes to his fellow creatures, as well as to God.* Allow me to make one very common and indeed very unquestionable supposition. If it be granted me, I know not how the inference can be avoided; and therefore I must leave it to the conscience of those who neglect family religion. Does the Holy Spirit convince any one of sin, shew him the need of a Saviour's Atonement and Righteousness, fill his heart with earnest desires to flee from the wrath to come, make him anxious for fellowship with Jesus, that he may thus enjoy Him as a portion, and imitate Him as an example? Now, if that individual, over whose opened heart angels are rejoicing, and in whom the Lord of angels who bought him sees the travail of his soul, be placed in a prayerless family, will he not be hindered in seeking the way to Zion, so far as the want of means of grace can hinder him? If on the other hand, he have a family altar, where the Redeemer's sacrifice is pleaded by faith to all around it,

and a dwelling, where God is worshipped in the beauty of holiness, would he not feel his heart strengthened, and his feet upheld to run the way of God's commandments? Would it make no difference, whether he were led by the necessities of his case to his secret and sad chamber, as the prophets of the Lord by Obadiah to their caves; or as Elijah to the wilderness, and there fed alone, when he might have the wine and milk of evangelical consolation in communion with holy brethren; who having themselves tasted that the Lord is gracious, would gladly lead him to the same fountain of all-sufficient happiness? I grant that such a chamber might be the saddened and fainting Christian's Patmos, where God might exhibit the glorious sovereignty of his grace, in brighter revelations of the Saviour's love, and the Saviour's law of love, than if he had been partaker with the most spiritual assemblies of his fellow-Christians. But the external hindrances would be the same: and as God works by means, in ordinary cases, to build up his beloved in their most holy faith; and as family praying in the Holy Ghost is one of those means; it must be a guilt, at which to tremble indeed, where such stumbling blocks are laid before the little ones

of the Redeemer : and it were better that a millstone were hung around the neck of him who lays them there, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea, than that he should so offend.

Even as the contributions that are poured into the treasury of God for the spread of his Son's truth throughout the world, by various religious societies, are formed of small sums, the least of which would be missed ; or as the waters of the ocean are formed of the little rills that fall from the mountains into the rivers, and thus flow into the bosom of the great deep ; so does the religion of the community arise from the aggregate godliness of families and individuals. Every household therefore, wherein God is honoured and worshipped in spirit and in truth, and wherein men go from confessing Him at the family altar, to confess Him in every occupation of relative life, provides an absolute outpouring of godliness upon the mass of society. There is a savour of the name of Jesus, spread over it with delightful fragrancy. There is a positive increase of public holiness ; and in the same degree, a blessing bestowed upon the land and its inhabitants.

If the Canaanites had their religion—a mere godless superstition, whereby they were misled and lost, did it not become Abram to exhibit that better form of worship, which God the Holy Ghost had taught him to know and love? If the world has its religion, stamped with its own image, and bearing its own superscription, the mere counterfeit of that which God requires; shall not the Christian, when he sees deluded men, taking service with Satan, and worshipping, with the blinded idolaters around him, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and whatsoever is not of the Father, but is of the world—feel the power of his Saviour's claim upon him, to exhibit in his own practice, the new and better way of peace and happiness of which the world knows nothing? If Noah, as a preacher of righteousness, condemned the world, while he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith, shall not you, who believe, and hold fast to your hearts, the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, leave family and therefore personal irreligion without excuse, so far as your own example, and that of your household can extend? And I would ask, whether there be any better method of bearing this testimony, than

by walking, like David, within your house with a perfect heart; and opening, like Daniel, the windows of an unpretending consistency, to Him whose you are and whom you ought to serve?

Intercession also, which composes an essential, and truly fragrant part of the general incense of family prayer, is a blessing upon others. Little did the hardened transgressors in Sodom think, that Abraham was pleading for them. Little did they dream, that if an overwhelming awe of Jehovah had not closed his lips from uttering one more petition, their city would have been saved from the fire of heaven, for the sake of that righteous family which he bore on his heart before God. And if there be consolations in prayer for the wrestlers with God at his throne of grace, it is not the least, that while blessings will be given to the intercessor for others, in his own soul, even as the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends; the souls of others may also be given, according to the divine purpose, to such supplication, as God's appointed way that they should be led to Jesus. Intercessory prayer is greatly neglected in Christian families, and much wrong is thereby done to many, who

have a right to expect at our hands, a pleading remembrance on their behalf with God. It ought not so to be. I affectionately ask of you who have family altars, that it may not be so with you. When you remember the Sacrifice of Christ, when you remember his all prevailing Intercession for yourselves, do not forget to present others by Him to the Father; that they also may have the sprinkling of the same Atonement, and the Almighty plea of the same Advocate.

It would be easy to continue this subject, and to extend it far beyond the limits hitherto reached; but the time allows not. I merely aim, to strike a few of the chords which should vibrate upon your hearts, when this great theme is opened, and would leave you, who are spiritual, to make the modulations. I must not however close my remarks without a few words of appeal.

To the rulers of prayerless families. I would be clear from your blood; and therefore, I would beseech you to be clear from the blood of those, whose eternal interests God hath providentially intrusted to you, as well as their present need and bodily welfare. "Prayerless families are so many defenceless citadels, lying open and exposed to the incursion of every foe:

whereas the houses of the truly devout, are like castles where the Lord dwells, and which are garrisoned with the Divine Presence." Are you the appointed warders of these towers? See then, that you neglect not your charge; see that you do not leave them without the Almightiness of God for their protection. I do not indeed expect that you should pray with your domestic circle, until the Spirit of grace and supplication has been poured upon you, overruling and inciting you to plead with God for yourselves: because it were an absolute contradiction to the dealing of God to indulge such an expectation. Abram built no altar, until Jehovah had appeared unto him, and lighted up the knowledge of salvation within his heart. Oh that God therefore, even God the Holy Ghost, may open the windows of heaven, and pour out the grace of conversion upon you; that you may look in holy faith to Jesus; and then by the light of your example, that others also may be led to Him; so that eventually, you and yours may become one fold, under one Shepherd! Why should your houses be like the mountains of Gilboa, on which no heavenly dews fall to water and refresh them? Why should children, or ser-

vants, whose hearts the Holy Spirit may have touched and changed, have to feel the barrenness of spiritual things in your family, and mourn their own sad portion in it? This profaneness will not die with you. It may be, as I have already observed, a dreadful legacy to those who survive you. The worshippers of God will be grieved for what they daily see, and what they daily miss, in your houses; and the ungodly will be confirmed in their rebellion by the example of a prayerless master or mistress: or, more awful still, of both together; of both united in a fearful conspiracy against the honour of God, and the souls of others. Shall you and yours labour for the meat that perisheth, as if there were no other world, but that in which you live: and wholly neglect the bread that came down from heaven, the flesh of the son of man, which He gave for the life of the world? Shall you and yours live, as if there were no Father who made the world, and adopted his saints to glorify Him; no Saviour, essential Deity, in human flesh, who redeemed them to God by his blood; and no Holy Ghost, who puts Christ into the hearts of his disciples, and seals them unto salvation?

Are you, however, at all anxious concerning

your own salvation, and desirous of coming to Jesus merely for your own instruction ; and, it may be, by night and in concealment from the world, whose ridicule you dread ? And shall it suffice you to be thus cowardly—to perform one duty in a corner, and omit every other—to seek a Saviour personally to yourselves, and yet bar the doors of your house against Him ? Awake from this delusion, and let not the fear of man any longer bring a snare upon you. In times of wasting pestilence, it was customary to mark those houses wherein the plague was raging, with a cross, which testified to the misery of its inhabitants. Beware that there be no mark upon your houses, to shew that the deep and deadly infection and plague-spot of family ungodliness hath infected the members within. There can be no sanctification in the outward comfort of such prayerless households ; and the curse of God, not less dreadful, because it is invisible, will be poured out, in blinded minds, hardened hearts, seared consciences, and spirits of slumber. If you, who are rulers of prayerless families, know any thing of these awful dangers, by God's teaching, will you allow another night to pass without erecting the family altar ? If any of you are prayerless heads of

prayerless families, how shall you escape the wrath of God, while you thus continue in sin and encourage others in their rebellion, by the authority and influence of your examples. Follow not a multitude to do evil. Be not encouraged in family atheism, because there are so many who profess it. Will you indeed rush with the herd into the deeps, and perish because you have company in your destruction.

Will you tell God, and his people, and the world, that you are so tied and bound and hindered from the performance of religious duties at home, by fear and apprehension, that you cannot conduct family worship as you ought. That is a wretched modesty which is ashamed of duty. Name it not before God, with any hope that He will accept an excuse which your own unbelief alone has induced you to make. Would God this might be the last prayerless day in every house around us! Would God that the Book of Life were opened in the midst of every family circle! Then might it be hoped that salvation had indeed come to every sin-dwelling. There would be few greater joys in the life of a minister, and in the stores of mercy wherewith, amidst its trials, difficulties, and hindrances, he may still lift up his heart to give

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God the glory of having in any degree blessed it, then that he should be summoned, to commence the duty and privilege of domestic worship and instruction, in the house of any hitherto prayerless family.

SERMON XIV.

ABRAM'S FAITH IN ECLIPSE.

GENESIS XII. 10—14.

AND THERE WAS A FAMINE IN THE LAND: AND ABRAHAM WENT DOWN INTO EGYPT TO SOJOURN THERE; FOR THE FAMINE WAS GRIEVOUS IN THE LAND. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN HE WAS COME NEAR TO ENTER INTO EGYPT, THAT HE SAID UNTO SARAI HIS WIFE, BEHOLD NOW, I KNOW THAT THOU ART A FAIR WOMAN TO LOOK UPON: THEREFORE IT SHALL COME TO PASS, WHEN THE EGYPTIANS SHALL SEE THEE, THAT THEY SHALL SAY, THIS IS HIS WIFE: AND THEY WILL KILL ME, BUT THEY WILL SAVE THEE ALIVE. SAY, I PRAY THEE THOU ART MY SISTER: THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH ME FOR THY SAKE AND MY SOUL SHALL LIVE BECAUSE OF THEE.

THE biography of the Bible is a gallery of portraits; and every picture in it is painted with the unflattering pencil of the Holy Ghost. Why is it thus? Why are not the failings of holy men cast into shade, and their excellences brought out into the strongest and clearest

lights? Surely, not only because such painting would be inconsistent with the truth of God; but that another, and a most important purpose may be answered by this impartial representation of good and evil, sin and holiness, in the saints of the Most High. While the household of salvation glorify God, for the triumphs of his grace, which made these elder worthies of the Church what they were; their manifest haltings in the divine life are meant to warn us to have no other pattern of imitation than the Great Exemplar of the Church; and to be followers of others, only as their path was trodden according to the blessed footsteps of his most holy life. Therefore it is, that lest men should idolize the virtues of their fellow worms of the earth; and think all would be well, if their standard were attained, the wisdom of God permitted them to fall into sin; and that, in the exercise of those very graces, for which they are brought before the notice of the Church. A lesson is thus read, that no flesh should glory in the presence of God. A testimony is thus given to the needfulness of that fountain which is opened in Christ Jesus for sin and for uncleanness. The believer's completeness is shewn, not to be in himself; but in the Incar-

nate Word—the everlasting perfection of his disciples. The Christian is taught to raise his view of goodness above all created example ; to be holy as God is holy, and perfect, as God is perfect. O how increasingly dear, in every instance of human infirmity, which the Christian feels in himself, or sees in others, should be the finished salvation of his Lord ! How precious, in the unquestionable concurrency of all example, that “ *there is not a just man upon earth, who doeth good, and sinneth not,*”¹ should be the love and work of Him whose perfect righteousness is the only cause of justification before God !

Among these examples, that of Abram is very striking. We have followed his path thus far in brightness ; and seen, I hope, something of the beauty of his walk of faith. We are now bidden to look upon his temporary eclipse, and notice the dark shadow through which he must pass, before the restoring Spirit of God brings him again into the light and truth of that simple belief which was yet the eminent characteristic of his gracious life and conduct. The subject has two divisions.

¹ Eccles. vii. 20.

I. ABRAM'S OFFENCE.

II. HIS REBUKE.

And may God the Holy Ghost make our consideration of the virtues and failings of the father of the faithful, convincing to those, who walk in the sight of their own eyes, and after the poor devices of their own carnal policies ; and may He commend this portion of the patriarch's history, even to Christians, so prone, as all are, to walk rather by the glimmerings of their own reason, than by the eye of faith, singly and simply directed to the Sun of Righteousness !

I. ABRAM'S OFFENCE.

He went on journeying still towards the south, increasing the distance from the land of his former idolatries at every step ; passing through the country of promise, in its length and breadth, so that he might see its beauty ; and be graciously led towards the place wherein he was for a little while to sojourn. But now a mysterious providence befel him, putting his faith to a severe trial, and weighing it in the balances, with a temptation, against which it was found wanting. There was a famine in the land—in that very Canaan where God had promised him a heritage and a possession.

Was this then indeed the place whither the Most High had led him ; for which he was to leave the plenty and wealth of Chaldea ? Immediately after having built his altar, and witnessed for God amidst surrounding idolatries, must he strike his tent and depart, lest he and his household die of hunger ? Even so. And what is this mysterious dispensation, but a type of the walk of faith ? Afflictions may, and will abound for Christ. They who will live godly in Him must suffer persecution. They must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow Him. Trials and temptations will arise out of their very privileges, and to an extent, which may induce the short-sighted worldliness of unconverted men to consider them as fools, for resigning so much of present enjoyment, for such a manifest portion of conflict and trial as must attend a gracious confession of Christ crucified. But "*wisdom is justified of her children.*"¹ Canaan was still the land of promise, though oppressed by famine. And there are unsearchable riches in Christ, although the inheritors of his salvation may be visited with outward trouble. In the world they may have

¹ Matt. xi. 19.

tribulation, and that for his name's sake, but in Him, they shall have a peace which the world can neither give nor take away ; and their consolations also will abound by Christ.

The sad and humiliating infirmity of Abram, now under our examination, was not a solitary instance. The snare of the fowler was spread again, even in the sight of the bird so hardly escaped before ; again was the prey taken captive, and only delivered by the unchangeable mercy of God, acting towards his poor, weak, sinful friend, according to the promises and provisions of the everlasting covenant. He committed precisely the same offence towards Abimelech, King of Gerar,¹ twenty-four years after this grievous distrust of God : as if it were to shew how fearfully sin continues to abound, even in the hearts of those, from whom its curse and condemnation are removed for ever : and how much more the grace of God abounds in their pardon and restoration. Nay, nearly one hundred years after this period, and when Abraham's dust was mingled with that of Sarah in the cave of Machpelah,² Isaac his son was guilty of precisely the same sin ; and that too,

¹ Gen. xx.

² Gen. xxvi.

immediately after a most gracious revelation, wherein Jehovah had pledged his faithfulness and his oath, to do exceeding abundantly for him, above all that he could ask or think. Oh what malignity and power are there in the strong and insidious workings of that *evil heart of unbelief which departeth from the living God,*¹ even when his children have just received the most solemn assurances of his love! In the very place and circumstances, where Abram's second denial of Sarah took place, did Isaac also deny Rebekah to be his wife; as though the awful example was meant expressly to teach every believing parent, that his sins and failures in the obligations of the divine life, may be evil examples to his children, and stumbling-blocks in the way of their spiritual course.

It will, however, be needful to approach the sin of Abram more closely and examine it

(1) *In its acting.* It was a decided prevarication. Sarah was indeed his half sister, as being the daughter of his father Terah, by another wife. So far he spake the truth. But he meant to deceive the Egyptians as to the fact that she was also his wife; and thus his prevarication involves, (as such miserable sub-

¹ Heb. iii. 12.

terfuges always must involve) the very essence of an untruth. For what is a falsehood? That which is either done or said to make those who see or hear the act or the speech, receive an impression concerning it, which the doer or the sayer knows to be essentially contrary to the fact and reality. *How are the mighty fallen! How is the gold become dim, how is the most fine gold changed!*¹ What a great and mournful departure has Abram made from the way of God, and the simplicity of faith! These things are written for our ensamples, who profess to be his seed. *Let him therefore, that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*² And may the everlasting arms of power, love, and faithfulness, keep us in the hour of temptation, which shall assuredly come to try our faith and confidence in the God of our salvation!

But such passages as these, are portions of holy writ, whither the sceptic gladly runs, as to a vantage-ground, from which he may hope to strike a heavier blow against the truth of God, and cast discredit upon his word. It is needful therefore, that while we entirely and unreservedly condemn the offence of Abram, and warn his spiritual posterity against sinning after the

¹ 2 Sam. i. 19. Lam. iv. 1.

² 1 Cor. x. 12.

similitude of his transgression, we also view the subject in its proper light, and deny the calumny heaped by infidels upon this man of God, as though not only a mean and sordid love of life had led him to this falsehood—for so let it be plainly called—but that he was willing even to be enriched with sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and men servants, and maid servants, and she asses, and camels, and pieces of silver, given both by Pharaoh and Abimelech, as the detestable purchase of his wife's dishonour. The charge is utterly groundless. One more unjust was never made against the Saints of the Most High, by those who say, "There, there, so would we have it." But it is at the same time a solemn caution to those Saints, how they walk; lest at any time they give the enemies of God, occasion to blaspheme. I cannot believe that Abram's personal safety was the first object in his mind, and the fountain whence this stream of guilty terror flowed. The promise of Jehovah, that in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed—a promise for which he had forsaken all, to follow in God's appointed way, was the leading subject of his thoughts, and the centre of his heart's repose, for his own, and for the Church's salvation. If he were then to die,

how could the promise be fulfilled? The Egyptians and the men of Gerar were strangers, as he believed, to the true God. If Sarah were torn from him, that promise, as it seemed, must come to an end for evermore. Hence he was led to that crooked and most indefensible policy, of making Sarah a partner in his untruth, and charging her soul, as well as his own, with the guilt of falsehood before God; that she also might be instrumental in avoiding that peril which he dreaded above all things—even the loss of the world's Redeemer, in his posterity. Jacob was a believer in the word and covenant of God, when he was led by his mother's most unholy persuasion to obtain the blessing of the birthright from his father Isaac. And thus they who still lean only for salvation upon the Lord Jesus Christ, fall into temptation and a snare, because they look not beyond themselves—and therefore think "the Lord's arm to be shortened that it cannot save, and his ear heavy that it cannot hear." Out of Abram's very interest therefore for the Church of God, does Satan take an advantage. And thus doth he transform himself into an angel of light, that he may spread guilt and darkness over the disciples of Christ. Abram thought there was no

fear of God in Egypt or Gerar. But where was the fear of God, that should have been within his own heart, when he could thus do an act, which in its manifest tendencies, was calculated to turn the very promise into misery to himself and his wife?

A greater danger, not only to our souls, but to our present true interest and happiness, lurks in deviating from the straight forward path of moral rectitude, than any which we can hope to escape by mean subterfuges and prevarications. The blessing of God, immediate as well as future, must only be expected to rest upon us, as "*in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world.*"¹ A lie was never necessary in any possible exigency of human life: and if the followers of our Lord are led astray by the devil to depart from Scriptural principles, in order to eke out the measures of his Almightyness, wisdom, care, and love, by the poor and dishonourable expediences of their own device, He will confound them in the Babel of their own building. The strength of Pharaoh to which they flee shall be their shame, and their

¹ 2 Cor. i. 12.

trust in the shadow of Egypt, their confusion. The Saviour might anoint the eyes of one blind from his birth, with clay made of earth and spittle; for his own Almightiness could make means apparently the most contradictory, successful. But if feeble man shall thus pursue his own foolish policies, to remove his difficulties, they will only become more inveterate, and more hopeless.

Nor let it be forgotten, by those who profess religion, and who should be jealous of the divine honour, that the more conspicuously the believer stands in the world's eye, the more injurious is the sin of his evil example. When the Saviour is thus wounded He may well say, "*It was not an enemy that reproached me; for then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.*"¹

Watch then, and pray against the devices of Satan to make you fall into any insincerity of walk before God: and let him not stand upon his high places in your sin before the Church,

¹ Psalm lv. 12, 13.

to wound others of its members; and bid the infidel stand beside him to enjoy his triumph.

(2.) Abram's sin must now be considered *In its Principle*. And in one word, the impulse was *Unbelief*. He exercised a renowned faith in the *final* promise of God; acting in high and gracious trust upon it. But he fails—painfully and very sinfully fails, in not exercising his belief with equal steadfastness in reference to *intervening circumstances*, to which both the promise and his faith were equally applicable. He trusted God for the *end*: but started aside in this case, like a broken bow, when called to rely implicitly upon Him for the *means* of producing that consummation. Alas for this common error, so destructive to the peace, as well as so unworthy of the high vocation of Christian professors! They can confide in Him "*who of God is made unto them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,*"¹ for all the infinitely precious, and everlastingly enduring interests of their souls. But they act as if they were called to lean upon a broken reed, when bidden to trust Him with the little interests of a day, and the petty con-

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30.

cerns of a body which to-morrow may be laid in the grave. They can suspend, with full assurance of faith, their expectation of pardon upon the propitiation of the cross. They can look confidently to that Everlasting Righteousness which the world's Redeemer has brought in by his perfect obedience, as their title to eternal life—sure beyond the possibility of successful challenge: and yet amidst the comforts of this unhesitating dependence, they can almost doubt the tender love, and infinite might of their heavenly Father, in matters of daily concernment. As though He who spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, would not, with Him also freely give them all things.¹ Believers have both the *ground* of faith, and the *grace* of faith: and yet they are continually acting as if the covenant, instead of being built upon the rock of ages, God in Christ, was set upon a quicksand; as if that foundation which bears the weight of a world's salvation, would not sustain a falling hair of the head, which has hardly weight enough to carry it to the ground at all. The moment a Christian turns aside to live by sense, he will not credit

¹ Romans viii. 32.

the promises, or the truth of their unchangeable Giver, unless he be bribed with sensible consolations. He will not rest his soul upon the bare undertakings of God in his behalf, if the props of manifest providences seem about to be withdrawn. "*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*"¹

A faith, thus feeble and interrupted, is so sinfully hasty, that it cannot wait upon God, even for a moment: but if the answer of its petulant petition come not on the instant, is ready at once to say, "*The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard.*"² Whereas it is faith's truest duty and dearest joy to attend upon its Almighty object, and say, "*I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.*"³ The promise is faithful, the performance will be sure.

Marked and sad was the difference between Peter, crying in the zeal of his love to Jesus, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water;" and that same Peter, when he exclaimed in his unbelieving agony, "Lord save

¹ John xx. 25.² Psalm xciv. 7.³ Micah vii. 7.

me." Peter differs awfully from himself, when hearing only the Lord's voice saying "Come;" and giving him in that invitation, the assurance of an inviolable safety; and when his ear opened only to the howling of the winds. He differed awfully from himself, when seeing Christ walking the deep—the pledge of his own preservation from sinking; and when he looked only on the waves which threatened to engulf him. The moment a Christian allows himself to consult flesh and blood, instead of God, his word, his precept, his promise, all is dark, discouraging, and threatening. "The fear of man bringeth a snare:" and he will not escape it, without injury to his peace. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as the Mount Sion, which may not be removed, but standeth fast for ever." They who turn away from Him, to terrify themselves with the threatenings of second causes, when the providential heaven seems to lower around them, are wandering from mountain to hill, having forgotten their resting place. Oh for the voice of God to say to such a trembling believer, "*I, even I, am He which comforteth you! Who art thou that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that should die, and of the Son of man that shall be made as grass; and*

forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?¹" "Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread: and He shall be for a sanctuary."²

If the Saviour's love hath been made known to you,—if you can realize your interest in his engagements on your behalf, you will do wisely often and thankfully to consider the grounds of your faith. The promise of help in every time of need, is sealed and made sure. The faithfulness of God is concerned; and his oath has been uttered. Do not then dishonour Him by unbelief, and by fleeing to sinful refuges, when the hour of trial comes. Meet it in the might of God. Stand by and see his salvation. No flaw will ever be detected in the beauty of his providences. The fault will invariably be found

¹ Isaiah li. 12, 13.

² Isaiah viii. 12—14.

in your infidelity. And therefore, the Redeemer first rebuked the want of trust in his disciples, "O ye of little faith wherefore did ye doubt," and then rebuked the wind and the sea; and there was a great calm. Do not expect a sufficient and unfailing supply from the shallow rill of your own device, when you turn away from the eternal fountain of God's Almightyness. Do not set a pile of dust, and a heap of ashes, above Him who made and sustains the world. Do not esteem any created hindrance and antagonist to be an enemy, whom the might of the Creator cannot subdue. Rest upon the arm of God, ye who acknowledge Him as your trust, in all providential difficulties. "*There hath no temptation taken you, (and no one can take you,) but such as is common to man: and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way for you to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"¹

But when the risings of unbelief become your shame and your sorrow, I intreat you, whose hidden life is notwithstanding, that of faith in the Son of God, not to question the

¹ 1 Cor. x. 13.

truth of your gracious trust, for every fainting fit that comes over it, as to the promises in this life. Abram lived not only to regret his sin, but to bear many a noble testimony, and make many a bold stand for the God of his salvation. Mourn and lament for your unbelief, so dishonourable to God, and so unworthy of his character. Betake you to the blood of sprinkling. Betake you to God's restoring Spirit: and seek new strength from Him, that you may no longer walk, like Peter, afar off; but abide unshrinkingly with Him, who hath said to the feeblest member of his spiritual Church, "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee." Have no dread, equal to that of displeasing God: and no prayer more urgent than that of holy David, "*Hold Thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.*"¹

II. UPON THE REBUKE OF ABRAM'S SIN, time forbids me to dwell at length: and surely it cannot be needful to lay it in many words before those who have learned to form any estimate of the tender mercy, wherewith God heals the backsliders from his faith, and continues to love them freely.

¹ Psalm xvii. 5.

(1.) *That rebuke was gracious, beyond all human expectation.* Abram might well have looked for a fearful manifestation of divine displeasure, when he proposed to be more wise than God. He might have well expected, that the falsity wherewith he had charged his own soul, and his wife's soul, might have been severely visited upon him: and that as he had sown to the wind, he might reap the whirlwind, in finding Sarah taken indeed from him, and made the concubine of Pharaoh, at one time, and of some of the people of Abimelech at another. But blessed be God who doth not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us after our iniquities! Blessed be God who pours coals of fire, upon the coldness of love and faith, within the hearts of his servants, when both are ready quite to die, by loading them with mercies instead of judgments! Thus, when his people, and Abram among them, *were but a few men in number, yea, very few, and strangers in the land; when they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people; He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, He reprov'd kings for their sakes.*"¹ How won-

¹ Psalm cv. 12, 13.

derfully does He interfere to bring them forth from the furnace into which their own unbelief has cast them; and thus indicate at once the mightiness of his love, and the sovereignty of his grace!

It deserves remark, that while the faith of Abram and Sarah is recorded by the Holy Ghost, in Hebrews xi, their unbelief, in the same and other instances, is passed by in absolute silence; as though it were to shew the Church, what doubtless the same eternal Spirit testified to them, that God had blotted out as a thick cloud their transgressions, and as a cloud their sins of distrust and infidelity. The example of their failing in the grace of faith, is given in the history, as a warning; while in the good report of them, the strong exercise of that grace is alone remembered, as an example to the Church. And not only did they depart in peace and safety, both from Egypt and Gerar, but they went away loaded with presents and benefits. Was this then an encouragement to sin? Was this dealing towards them, meant to shew that God lightly regarded their iniquity, —nay, that God approved it? Oh, far from us be the dreadful impiety of such a supposition! No: it was the overflowing of mercy,—it was

profusion of love,—it was the outpoured
of unimaginable tenderness; whereby
, perhaps, their hearts could be bound up.
as the Omnipotence of goodness to keep
from despair; to lift up the hands of
faith, and to strengthen its feeble knees
they might better run the way of God's
mandments. Where sin had abounded,
e much more abounded. It is equally
's present mode of dealing with his un-
ving children: and thus doth He say to
, (may every one of them hear his voice,
be led by the bands of his tenderness to
solely and implicitly upon Him,) "*O Israel*
return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast
been brought down by thine iniquity. I will heal their back-
ing, I will love them freely: for mine anger
is turned away from him"¹

) But infinitely tender as this rebuke might
was yet humiliating, almost beyond any other
might be imagined. In one case, Pharaoh,
athen king, remonstrates with Abram,
hat is this that thou hast done unto me,
didst thou not tell me that she was thy
?" And the father of the faithful thus

¹ Hosea xiv. 1, 4.

overtaken with a sense of his sin, and bow to the dust by the equity and righteousness his reprovcr, is left without reply. In the other case, Abimelech said unto him, "Wilt thou hast thou done unto us, and what have offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom, a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done:" and Abram can only offer a mean and dishonest apology.

The pleading, ex postulating, reproaching look of the persecuted Saviour, might well break the heart of Peter, so that he went forth and wept bitterly. But there was an especial shamefulness to Abram, in the humiliation of being placed under the rebuke of such reprovers: even as to Jonah, when the heathen shipmaster came and awoke him, and said, "*Wilt thou sleepest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon God; if so be that God will think upon us, we perish not.*"¹ And thus must the children of their Father who is in heaven expect to be humbled, and dishonoured, convinced, even by worldly men, when they forsake the Rock of their strength, and th

¹ Jonah i. 6.

of their God, and the obligations, under which redeeming love has laid them, to follow miserable expediences, that they may avoid a difficulty, or secure an advantage, by means, of which, men high-minded and honourable, according to this world's erring standard, would be ashamed. Avoid the snare ; and when such temptations assail you, answer in the gracious loftiness of Nehemiah's spirit, " So will not I, because of the fear of God."

It is the sin and the shame of our public, our social, and, too generally, of our more private conduct, that instead of standing upon the holy and immoveable rock of God's perfect word, adapted as it is to every possible procedure and circumstance of human life, and looking with a single eye, that God in all things may be glorified, we make the ever-shifting quicksand of a poor and unworthy expediency, the foundation, on which we base our actions Godward, and man-ward. That expediency, has a most mischievous power of adapting itself to all the selfish policies of a fallen nature, prone to seek its own things, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's. The consequence is obvious. Our professing Christianity, mournfully wants the magnificence of simplicity, and the unequi-

•

vocal beauty of a devoted consistency. Nationally and individually, we are thus placed - the tender mercies of every imminent temptation; and in our miserable short-sightedness have no eye for the glory, the help, or the consolations of that God who has promised to honour them who honour Him, by an honest and intrepid connexion of Himself, his law, his covenant, and his praise, with all they think, and do, and say. That sad and mean expediency brought sin, shame, and danger, even upon the friend of God. It has thrust, as I fear, our country near to the awful brink of national convulsion. It defiles and impoverishes the course of our private actions. The blessing of the Most High God can never be expected to attend it. May the Eternal Spirit of God, pour forth the grace of a simple faith in his wise sovereignty, and fatherly care of his Church upon us; so that all of us who profess gracious membership with the Lord Jesus Christ, may turn round in any difficulty, however apparently insurmountable, upon the lying seductions of worldly expediency, which would lead us to dishonour God by resting on creature helps; as Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, said to the King of Babylon: "O Ne-

Buchadanezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O King. But if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up!" Daniel iii. 16—18.

SERMON XV.

THE SEPARATION BETWEEN ABRAM AND LOT.

GENESIS XIII. 8, 9.

ABRAM SAID UNTO LOT, LET THERE BE NO STRIFE, I SEE
THEE BETWEEN ME AND THEE, AND BETWEEN MY HERD-
MEN AND THY HERD-
MEN; FOR WE BE BROTHERS. IS NOT THE
WHOLE LAND BEFORE THEE? SEPARATE THYSELF, I PRAY
THEE FROM ME. IF THOU WILT TAKE THE LEFT HAND,
THEN I WILL GO TO THE RIGHT: OR IF THOU DEPART TO
THE RIGHT HAND, THEN I WILL GO TO THE LEFT.

CIRCUMSTANCES of pressing urgency may occur,
to separate spiritual minds from those habits
and associations, in which they delight: but the
moment such pressure is removed, they will
return with joy to their rest, and resume their
beloved employments. The famine obliged
Abram to go down, and sojourn in Egypt: no
sooner however does he learn that the Lord had
visited Canaan, in giving his people bread, than
he journies thitherward again; "*for where his*

*treasure was, there was his heart also."*¹ He entered the land of promise at its southern extremity, which lay towards the north-east of Egypt; but he halted not until he had again reached Bethel, where he had built his altar, and called on the name of the Lord; that he might resume his beloved worship, and glorify again the God of his salvation, in the scene of former mercies.

It might be imagined, that he would now remain at peace on this consecrated ground. But very little is known of the divine dealing, by those who have not learned that wheresoever the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty build their rest, their heavenly Father will put a thorn in it, to hinder them from lying too closely and securely there. Trial found Abram in Bethel; and the cause originated with his own family. The instructive history of this inroad on his comfort may shew us—

I. THE CONDUCT OF ABRAM.

II. THE CONDUCT OF LOT.

The dark foil, upon which the diamond is mounted, serves to bring out more strongly the brilliancy of the gem; and such is the power of

¹ Matt vi. 21.

contrast in the present case. It will be noticed by shewing,

I. THE CONDUCT OF ABRAM.

The soil of Canaan, with little exception, was occupied by the people of the land, in actual tenure; although the father of the faithful had God's own warrant for its possession. When therefore Abram came thither, rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold; when Lot also, who went with him, had flocks and herds and tents, there was not sufficient pasturage to feed the whole. "*The land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.*"¹ Their prosperity, instead of increasing the closeness of family love, became the very element of family separation. This world's wealth, and the sordid opposition of interests which it involves, too often wither the charities of kindred or domestic life, or at least alienate the members of the same household much more from each other, than when their common store was less. Not so "*the unsearchable riches of Christ.*"² The more fully they are imparted by Him, and enjoyed by his disci-

¹ Gen. xiii. 6.

² Eph. iii. 8.

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ples, the more closely are those disciples united to each other in love, as common members of his body. Towards that unalloyed and holy wealth then, should the followers of their Lord be directed, with an unquenchable desire to possess it, and to "*be filled with all the fulness of God.*"¹

Abram was rich; yet he was the friend of God. How was this? How can the camel go through the eye of a small needle, or the rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven? Hath not man's Saviour, and man's unerring Prophet put the solemn question, and invested it with difficulties that seem almost to imply impossibility? It cannot be denied that He has: and well He knew what was in the heart of man, when He put the interrogation upon record. Riches have assuredly a direct and dreadful tendency to fill us with the love of the world, rather than of that invisible and eternal good which centres in the Everlasting God, as the real wealth of his creatures. But then they involve no absolute necessity to produce this awful result. They are not adamantine bars and bolts to exclude men who have an ample portion of them from the unmoving glories of a better world. That exclusion

¹ Eph. iii. 19.

rests with their abuse. Our own corrupt nature converts the abundance which God bestows, into occasions of idolizing the gift, to the dishonour of the Almighty Giver, and of departing from Him, in the affections of the heart.

That the mere possession of riches cannot destroy a soul, is plain and obvious. Abram was rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. Lazarus was a beggar, destitute, and filled with sore disease; but when he died, angels carried this poor outcast into Abram's bosom, and there they dwell together, in the separate rest of the Lord Jesus Christ. The fault therefore, is not in God, nor in the wealth which He bestows; that so few of its possessors tread the way of salvation, and enter into the kingdom of God but that Satan thus takes advantage of our sinful nature, to make men misapply the bounties of the Most High, to his dishonour, and their own destruction. He who is rich in this world's good, is however placed in a situation of peril, which should be continually summoning him to watch and pray, that he may count all things but loss for Christ: and then with God all things are possible.

(1) The circumstances of Abram at this period of his history called forth a beautiful

exhibition of *his Disinterestedness*. Canaan had been conferred, not upon Lot, but upon his uncle, by the solemn title of an especial promise from God. Yet without a murmur, and apparently without an effort, does he say to his nephew, “*Is not the land before thee?*” And Lot is bidden to choose what portion he may please to occupy. If there be any pastures more rich, any streams more copious, in one place than another, he is directed to make his own election, with a liberality which he was little disposed to imitate. There is a largeness of heart in the offer, attesting within Abram’s mind a consciousness of wealth beyond the power of Canaan, beyond the power of the world’s riches to bestow. Such generosity is—if I may so speak, graciously natural to those who know that they have Christ in all things, and all things in Christ; as their Father’s wisdom makes the distribution.

If Abram had been generous, simply because he was rich, his example would have been an anomaly in the world’s history—a strange contradiction to the experiences of natural and unconverted man. Riches tend rather to close, than to expand the generous affections of the heart. They do not encourage their owner in

pouring them forth upon the necessities of others. Abram was, however, a saint of God. He looked therefore for his true possession beyond the sheep walks and wells of Canaan, even to the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. His portion—that on which he lived by faith, though invisible, was immeasurably more vast and magnificent, than any about which the herdmen of Lot contended with his own: and therefore, the petty difference that could exist between a dwelling in this or that quarter of the land, was of little moment. He could afford to be generous, and give Lot the choice, where only some momentary and perishing advantage could be gained or lost to him, by his nephew's election. Alexander reserved to himself the hope of mighty conquests, in addition to the realm which was his own by birth; and therefore, he gave away many kingdoms; realizing the bright expectancy which lived continually in his eye. The Christian also, in whose heart the Holy Ghost hath lighted up a hope of blessedness to come, that maketh not ashamed, in addition to his present heritage of peace, joy, holiness, and triumph in his Redeemer, may well stand aside, in holy quiet, allowing others to press before.

their hot and hasty pursuit after the
t and fading good, for which they pant.
ay well understand the words of our
Jesus Christ—“*It is more blessed to give
to receive.*”¹ Such disinterestedness is
ly the disciple’s duty and ‘pleasure; for it
the mind of his Great Exemplar. “Ye
w the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that
ugh He was rich, yet for your sakes He became
or, that ye through his poverty might be
rich.”² The Redeemer’s love was, in truth,
perfectly pure. The sacrifice whereby He pro-
vided reconciliation between man and God, was
immense. Yet was it freely made, in behalf
of those, from whom He could hope for nothing
again, except to win them to love Him, by the
sense of that affection wherewith “*He loved
them, and washed them from their sins in his
own blood.*”³

The *enemy* of our souls is continually making
demands upon us for service, for peace, for
hope, for body, and for soul; and never ceases
trying, like the daughters of the horse leech,
“*Give, give.*” But the *Saviour* of our souls,
who gave Himself for them, that He might

¹ Acts xx. 35.

² 2 Cor. viii. 9.

³ Rev. i. 5.

redeem them to God, doth, with Himself, freely give us all things. And, if such was the disinterested nature of our Lord's affection, is it not a sad and mournful sight to behold the worldliness of his disciples—the eager desire of those who profess to have in Him, wealth which the world can neither give nor take away, to be among the foremost in their endeavours to abound in earthly things: as if Mammon were still have a shrine in their hearts; or Christ were an insufficient portion; or the Father would not with Him, communicate every other blessing. Paul had learned that best lesson, which the Spirit of God could teach, for his present comfort and peace; because he had learned, in whatever state he was, therewith to be content. But then the fulness of God's salvation was his portion. Therefore the selfishness of his nature was subdued; therefore the springs of holy love to others were opened within his heart; therefore he sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved. And if the life which any one is now living, be the life of faith in the Son of God, it ought to be manifested to the church, and to the world, by a holy and upright of conduct, which may ob

knowledge of him, that he has been with Jesus.

(2.) We have also a truly instructive example of *Abram's meekness*. He was the head of the whole family; the priest, the prophet, the king over them all. He was the especial object of the promises of God. Canaan was made over to him, and not to Lot, by the unchangeable decree, and sure declaration of the Most High. It was for him therefore, to determine where he would choose to pitch his own tent, and feed his own flocks: and it was for Lot to take what might thus be determined as his inferior portion. But while Abram freely resigns this unquestionable right of choice, with a disinterestedness, alas, so very uncommon in the world, he turns aside from his privilege with a meekness that it is impossible too much to admire. *Though he might have much boldness to enjoin Lot that which was convenient, yet for love's sake, he rather besought him.*¹ “*Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between my herdmen, and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the*

¹ Philemon 8, 9.

left hand, then I will go to the right : or if thou shalt depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." Full richly did the Spirit of God dwell in this disciple, enabling him to exhibit the quietude and tenderness of mind which God Himself exhibited, as the pattern of human conduct, when He became manifest in the flesh.

We admire, not merely the benefit, but the manner of bestowing it ; the soft answer ^{the} turneth away wrath ; the sweetness of mind ^{has} and expression, like the waters of Siloam which flow softly, and yet moisten the grounds, on which they fall, more effectually, than if they rushed over them with the hoarse outpouring of a violent flood. Oh would to God, this "*ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price,*"¹ were more precious in our own ! The Canaanite and the Perizzite might quarrel with each other ; for they had nothing but the land, for which they contended. The unbelievers, who have their portion in this life, may rudely or fraudulently endeavour to secure its better portions, each for himself : but they who have the love of God as their portion, and his glory as their bright

¹ 1 Peter iii. 4.

sured reversion, should meekly and retire from all contest with the men of world, and with each other. They are en; and it is pleasant when brethren together in unity. *“By this shall all now that ye are my disciples, if ye love nother.”*¹ They, in whose hearts his love affected, should endeavour to shew their finess thus practically to abide the test of r discipleship. They should *“follow peace h all men, as well as holiness, without which man shall see the Lord.”* *“Beloved, let us be one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”*²

But this brotherly affection can only be discovered by worldly men, (sharpsighted to discover the failings of spiritual Christians,) as they behave meekly towards each other, and towards those that are without. The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable. Endeavour therefore to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, in all your dealings with men. And, if you feel yourselves called upon to differ, see that it be without bitterness, and

¹ John xiii. 35.

² Heb. xii. 14. 1 John iv. 7.

wrath, and the leaven of any malice in t heart. "*Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye str together, and do wrong, one to another?*"¹ garment better becomes a Christian than me ness : and therefore, St. Paul bids the church Colosse, as the elect of God, to put it on. H great and awful the Majesty of God ! He provoked every day : but though strong, He is yet patient. His paternal mildness is at least as visible as his Almighty greatness. "*Be ye then perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*"² Jesus Christ bids you come and learn of Him ; not to open the eyes of the blind ; not to raise the dead ; not to cleanse the lepers ; not to feed five thousand with a few loaves and fishes ; but to be like Himself, meek and lowly in heart. And that which He calls upon you to learn, his Almighty Spirit waits to teach. "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the peacemakers ; for they shall be called the children of God.*"³

(3.) Nor would it be just to the patriarch, were I to omit *the* prudence of Abram, in offer-

¹ Acts. vii. 26.

² Matt. v. 48.

³ Matt. v. 3, 5, 9.

ing this choice to his nephew. It effectually removed all cause of offence, which Lot or his herdsmen could possibly take ; and was a sacrifice, well and wisely made for the security of peace and love between them. And man has no higher prudence than to count all things secondary, all things vile, all things lighter than vanity itself, in order, first, to have peace with God, even the termination of that awful strife which exists between the sinner and his Sovereign, his Maker, his Judge : and next, that his brother, his neighbour, and himself should live together in holy love. Abram trusted his interest and provision with Jehovah ; and well he might ; for his God would be to him a source of fulness that could never fail, a Helper, able to supply all his need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Abram had as many enemies as neighbours ; for the Canaanite, and the Perizzite were then in the land ; and all were waiting to devour. If, therefore, Lot and himself should quarrel, their watchful foes would be at hand, to make a prey of both. And is not Satan standing by, looking eagerly at the divisions so fearfully prevalent in the Church of God ? Doth it then become its members to weaken that Church, and lay it open to the

attacks of the serpent and the serpent's seed, while its members bite and devour one another? Surely a gracious disinterestedness in the things of this world, and a looking for our true heritage in the Redeemer, is our real wisdom. "God Incarnate, as the Father's Mediatorial Servant dealt very prudently. What was the manifestation of that prudence? *For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame; and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*"¹ Moses was prudent, when he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."² Amaziah was prudent, when he resigned the hundred talents, and the hundred thousand valiant men, whom he had enlisted into his army, and trusted his cause with the God of battles, rather than rest upon an arm of flesh, contrary to the will and bidding of Jehovah.³ Paul was prudent when he said, "*I count all things but loss, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him.*"⁴ And it is the Christian's only

¹ Heb. xii. 2.² Heb. xi. 24—26.³ 2 Chron. xxv. 9.⁴ Phil. iii. 8, 9.

wisdom, that which the Holy Ghost teacheth, "to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; trusting that all other things shall be added unto him." Be this our prudence, our knowledge, in the school, where God the Holy Ghost maketh wise unto salvation. "*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*"¹

II. A few words must suffice to notice THE CONDUCT OF LOT: and only a few are needed: for it is broadly and painfully contrasted with that of Abram; and he who sees and understands the lights of a picture, has a good directory, by which to comprehend the breadth and gloom of its shadows.

(1.) Lot's behaviour to his uncle was marked by *A spirit of selfish covetousness*. Without one recorded wrestling of better thoughts against his grovelling desire of the richer portion, he took Abram at his word, "*He lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan; that it*

¹ Phil. iv. 6, 7.

was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east, and they separated themselves the one from the other." ¹ One ruling desire, the love of wealth, filled the eye of his mind, and blinded him to higher duties. That covetousness which is idolatry, took possession of his heart; and most sordid was the worship, paid within these chambers of imagery, to riches and distinction. A more unfitting, a more mean, a more unworthy idol than the eager desire to be rich, can hardly be set up in the soul; nor one which more effectually chokes all holy breathings for the salvation of God, and for a portion in the riches of the glorious gospel of his grace. "The friendship of the world is enmity against God: who-soever therefore will be a friend of the world he must be the enemy of God." ² No man can serve God and Mammon. "Love not then the world," ye who express your hope of interest in its Saviour, and your desire to perfect holiness in the fear of God. "Love not the world, neither

¹ Gen. xiii. 10, 11.

² James iv. 4.

*that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."*¹

Love of money is the root of all evil. It is the very noxious germ of that Upas tree of sin, which so many have lain down to sleep, lulled they were happy, while it distilled its deadly dew upon them, and poisoned them to eternal death. This world's abundance will consist with the wrath of God; sinners who dwelt in the cities of the plain in plenty and fulness of bread, while the angels and brimstone were slumbering overhead, waiting but the breath of Jehovah to smite them, and hurl them down.

Envy made Lot regardless of his rights; regardless of his own great advantage, in dwelling near to Abraham; regardless of profiting by his counsels; of being sustained by his power; of worshipping at his altar and of being included within the blessings of the promise. When this spirit of selfishness takes hold over the mind, it drowns all social

¹ 1 John ii. 15, 16.

love, it makes men sit loosely to the dearest of all earthly ties, responsibilities, and relations. It separates very friends, not merely those who should have one heart in the common interchange of the charities of life; but those to whom there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, and one salvation in his Son. It makes all men under its dreadful influence seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's: and I am persuaded that the gospel hath few greater hindrances among us, than that eager desire of wealth which seems to have engrossed, not only the men of this world, but those who profess to be the disciples of another Master, and the servants of a nobler Lord.

(2) The conduct of Lot is marked, by *A very awful disregard of spiritual danger*. He looked so steadily at the nature of the land where he wished to dwell, as to neglect all consideration of the character of its inhabitants. "*The men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.*"¹ They aimed at no concealment to their tremendous vices; and therefore Lot was inexcusable to pass them by.

¹ Gen. xiii. 13.

What fruit he gathered from the seed thus thoughtlessly scattered, the rest of his history plainly discloses. “*He sowed the wind, and he reaped the whirlwind.*”¹ We hear of no altar built by him, in imitation of his holy relative; who thus placed a mighty shield and barrier between himself and surrounding iniquities, by the constant worship of God. This neglect indeed, was to be expected in one whose heart was occupied mainly, with the desire of becoming rich and powerful. The conduct of Lot is, alas, too common. It is matter of every day’s experience. We are continually observing, even if we stand upon the margin of the river of worldliness, without being ourselves carried away by the flood,—how many cast themselves into it, and forsake the shore, where God would have been with them, and they with God, and all things would have been theirs, as one with Christ; if thereby they may gain some pecuniary advantage. The altar is forsaken; the land of Sabbaths and sanctuaries is left behind, and men plunge themselves into foreign temptations in pursuit of wealth, as recklessly as the great conqueror of Europe plunged himself amidst the wilds, and woods, and morasses, and

¹ Hos. viii. 7.

snows of Russia, from whence he himself hardly escaped, soon to fall from his place of greatness, and die on an obscure rock of the ocean; and where so many myriads of his devoted followers found their graves, instead of the glory for which they panted.

Nothing which wealth may bestow, can by any means compensate to a man, and especially to a young man, with principles perhaps little fixed in the truth, as it is in Jesus, and a mind opened to receive temptation, for going to live in the tents of wickedness, and for dwelling in the cities of the plain; led thither by the hope of being a little richer than he might perhaps have become, had he staid by his family altar, near to the people of God, and the heirs of promise. "*What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul; and what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*"¹ I know that occasions and necessities for such separations may arise; but let them not be sought, in the spirit of covetousness: lest God should gratify that desire with wealth, but send leanness withal into the soul; or at length, (which is at least as likely,) bid that mistaken professor of religion escape for

¹ Matt. viii. 36, 37.

his life, like Lot from the fires of Sodom, leaving the wealth thus guiltily sought, altogether unattained behind him.

I. This history may well enforce upon us, a holy jealousy for the honour of God. There was strife between the herdmen of Abram and Lot, and the Canaanite and the Perizzite were then in the land. What means the Holy Ghost by this notice? or is it without meaning at all? Assuredly not. The fact that they were surrounded by enemies of themselves, and of their God, was a call, both upon the uncle and the nephew, not to let those enemies see an unholy strife between them; nor to suffer such adversaries to witness them, at one moment kneeling around the same altar of peace, and the next at variance with each other. Well said Nehemiah to his brethren who sinned, while many foes stood around and beheld their iniquities, "*It is not good that ye do; ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?*"¹ Abram was well aware of this danger, and jealous for the honour of Jehovah. Aim, ye who profess his faith, to follow his

¹ Neh. v. 9.

example. Have your conversation honest in the world, and "walk in wisdom towards those who are without;" that whereas mockers would gladly speak against you as evil doers, they may be reprov'd who would thus blame you, seeing your good conversation in Christ. The enemies of our Lord would gladly charge your inconsistencies upon his faith; and thus encourage themselves in their rebellion against Him. Take away this cause of stumbling from them; and "*let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"¹

II. *We are also hereby taught the wonder-working sovereignty of God, in overruling all things, apparently the most adverse—even the sins of men—even the sins of his servants, to the advancement of his own glory, and the good of his Church.* Lot was thus enabled to preach righteousness, even to the men of Sodom. Abram had thus an opportunity to display his magnanimity and valour, in the rescue of his nephew. Lot was taught the difference between dwelling with sinners and saints, by sad experience: and God magnified his own rich

¹ Matt. v. 16.

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mercy, in delivering him from those snares, and those judgments into which he had so lightly cast himself. In like manner, the sin of the Jews, in crucifying the Lord of glory, was the instrument whereby God consummated the world's salvation. The death of Stephen extended the Gospel of life, by scattering abroad its preachers from Jerusalem, throughout many lands. The sharp contention of Paul and Barnabas, which led to their separation, brought more nations within hearing of the word of life, than if they had remained together. The wrath of man thus praises God, and the remainder of that wrath He will restrain. Beware, however, of the tremendous delusion of thinking, that though God may overrule man's sin to his own glory, man may therefore sin with impunity; that his iniquity may abound, in order that God's grace may much more abound. The blood of the Son of God was upon the Jews, and upon their children, for crucifying the Lord of glory; although you and I have the means of life and mercy, instrumentally through their dreadful guilt. Walk then, in his way, in his blessing, in his love: and leave the acts of his sovereignty to his own wise disposal, lest ye die in your sins.

SERMON XV.

I. Lastly, *Learn hence, The blessing of
nearly-mindedness.* If Abram had seen
beyond Canaan, he would hardly have
set up the best portion of it to Lot; but the
view of the Canaan which awaited his soul in
separate bliss, and his soul and body at the
second coming of Christ, made him independent
of the lesser present good. The latter had a
glory in his regard, by reason of the excellency
of the former. "*He rejoiced to see the day
of Christ, he saw it, and was glad.*" This was
all his salvation, and therefore all his desire
and here he had in Jesus, chosen that good
part which could not be taken away from him.
No other principle, than that of having our con-
versation in heaven, can rock our peevish spirits
to sleep in difficulties; and make us live above
the world. Such a tone of mind takes God
his word, in present trial and little outward
hope. "*Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see
wind, neither shall ye see rain: yet that valley,
which appears so dry, shall be filled with water.*"
"*Let your conversation then be without covet-
ousness; and be content with such things as ye
have; for He hath said, I will never leave you*

¹ John viii. 56.

² 2 Kings iii. 17.

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never forsake you."¹ Discontent is a
which stings those only who, like the
self, creep upon earth. Heavenly-
ess is the eagle's wing, to lift you
, to the region of brightness, purity,
ce in Christ.

¹ Heb. xiii. 5.

SERMON XVI.

RIGHTEOUS RETRIBUTION.

GENESIS XIII. 14—17.

THE LORD SAID UNTO ABRAM, AFTER THAT LOT WAS SEPARATED FROM HIM, LIFT UP NOW THINE EYES, AND LOOK FROM THE PLACE WHERE THOU ART, NORTHWARD AND SOUTHWARD, AND EASTWARD AND WESTWARD. FOR ALL THE LAND WHICH THOU SEEST, TO THEE WILL I GIVE IT, AND TO THY SEED FOR EVER. AND I WILL MAKE THY SEED AS THE DUST OF THE EARTH: SO THAT IF A MAN CAN NUMBER THE DUST OF THE EARTH, THEN SHALL THY SEED ALSO BE NUMBERED. ARISE, WALK THROUGH THE LAND, IN THE LENGTH OF IT, AND IN THE BREADTH OF IT: FOR I WILL GIVE IT UNTO THEE.

THE Bible is at once the most ancient, and the most authentic, of all historical records. The penmen by whom it was actually written, were many; but the whole amazing volume was begun, continued, and ended by one Author, even God the Holy Ghost. The principle of its composition, and the matter contained in it, might therefore be expected

to differ exceedingly from those of any other book in the world. And such is really the case. Other histories describe the rise, vicissitudes, and decline of empires; the political experiments made upon them; and the wars, of which each was in its turn the prize. The word of God, on the other hand, passes rapidly over these portions of providential administration; or turns from them altogether, to rest and dwell upon incidents in the lives of private men, of whom the world knew nothing; but of whom the world was not worthy. The history of redemption as much surpasses in importance—God being Judge—the annals of the mightiest of all earthly monarchies, as the concerns of eternity outweigh those of time and sense. “*Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation*” saith Jehovah, “*shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.*”¹ Therefore do we find Abram’s personal history occupying a prominent situation in the oracles

¹ Isaiah li. 6.

of God, denied to the most sagacious lawgiver, or the most renowned conqueror. The friend of God, the father of the faithful, the earthly head of the covenant made between the Persons of the ineffable Godhead, for man's salvation, stands above the illustrious of the earth, as Saul above the multitudes of Israel. What the Holy Spirit therefore, offers to our notice, in his eventful life, demands our entire reverence and regard, as ever we hope to be made partakers of that promise, which has been uttered and attested by the oath of God to him, and to his spiritual seed.

In the last discourse a contrast was drawn between the *disinterestedness*, the *meekness*, the *holy prudence* of Abram, and the *covetousness*, *selfishness*, and *reckless disregard* of plunging into temptation, which the conduct of Lot displayed. It will be something in the order of cause and consequence if we now contrast,

II. THE PROVIDENCES WHICH RESPECTIVELY REPEL THEM.

The experience of men in all ages of the world, has borne its ample testimony to that solemn declaration of the Most High, "*Them that honour Me, I will honour; and they that*

*despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."*¹ The saint and the sinner, the believer and the infidel, the children of God's love and the rebels against his mercy, have been, now are, and shall be, through all time, and all eternity, willing or unwilling witnesses of its truth. Among those who believe on Him to the saving of the soul, some,—following Him fully, and others, with more divided hearts, an observant eye will often see great differences in providential dealings, as well as in gracious communications of his love. It was so with Abram and Lot: and we may proceed to review their succeeding fortunes.

(I.) THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HAPPENED TO LOT.

He travelled onwards to the rich and fertile plain of the vale of Jordan; doubtless exulting in the wisdom of his choice, and taking credit for his prudence in securing it to himself. He led his flocks into its green pastures, and laid himself down by its still waters; and thought all was well. He was "exceeding glad of his gourd." But God had prepared a worm to smite the gourd, that it withered, and a vehement

¹ 1 Sam ii. 30.

east wind to arise, and a scorching sun of providential displeasure to beat upon his head, that he fainted.¹ He pitched his tent towards Sodom. He sought intercourse and communion with men who were sinners before the Lord exceedingly; and he appears to have affianced his daughters to the inhabitants of this awfully iniquitous city. But a speedy opportunity of correcting his erroneous judgment, was forced upon him: and he was taught by a variety of solemn lessons, that "*the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.*"²

(1.) *Five years after his selfish departure from Abram, he was a despoiled and plundered captive.* Five kings of the Canaanites, who had been tributaries to Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, revolted against him. Having summoned three of his vassal princes, he invaded Canaan, discomfited the kings of the five cities of the plain of Sodom, in which Lot had pitched his tent; and carried him away captive, together with those wicked men, whose exceeding iniquities had thus provoked Jehovah to punish them. Lot is found in the society of impious men; and he must take his part of

¹ Jonah iii. 6, 7.

² 1 Cor. iii. 19.

fatherly chastisement from God, with those who had visitations of judgment in the same outward providence. Daniel, Mordecai, Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, with many more, were saints and servants of the Most High, when the holy city was taken by Nebuchadnezzar; yet they were led captive with the guilty and obdurate nation; and were compelled to hang their harps in sorrow upon the willows of Euphrates. If it were thus with those who testified against the abominations of the land, wherein they dwelt, because it was the country of their nativity, the place of their holy solemnities, and the chosen heritage of God, surely they who left the sacred enclosure which Abram had drawn around him,—the hallowed and happy fold of a religious community, where Jehovah was known, and worshipped, and loved,—to choose a portion among idolaters and gross transgressors, for the simple love of gain, might well expect that the displeasure of God would attend and recompence their folly, with sorrow, and shame, and loss. If they who profess his service, will thus rashly and daringly sit by the seat of the scornful, and dwell among the tents of ungodliness, they must have fallen into a mournful spirit of the heart's slumber,

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to expect that God, through His servants alone, will reprove them, and set them right in the things that they have done, by leaving them in temporal poverty, not in spiritual emptiness. Surely Satan himself can forge no stronger chains to bind the heart of a professing servant of God than those of which a worldly, grasping, and covetousness of heart and affections furnish the materials. God may justly deprive men of those seductions which have led them to quit the communion with his Church, in its ordinances, and the example of its members. We "*forsake the fountains of waters, and hew out to ourselves cisterns, that can hold no water*;" must perhaps be brought to unlearn the folly of our choice, by the loss of outward comforts, as well as the drying up of our hearts, like the brook of Barbec. And when that hour of bereavement comes, it will be well, it will be an exercise of God's merciful and powerful mercy in our behalf, if we

so wedded to our worldly idols, as to think all things lost, when they are removed ; and each to say with Micah, when the Danites robbed him of his images, “ *Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and what have I more ?* ” ¹

(2.) *By pitching his tent nigh to Sodom, Lot chose a place, where “ he was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.”* ² The men with whom he sojourned had cast off, not only all sense of virtue, but all sense of ordinary modesty. Pride and fulness of bread made them even glory in their shame. The fearful display of their guilt defied God ; and made the burdened land groan in its weariness beneath them. They spread an atmosphere around them, which it was impossible to breathe for a moment without pollution. Lot had the knowledge of God, a sense of the holiness of his nature, the purity of his law, and therefore, of the desperate recklessness, with which these sinners against their own souls were defying and dishonouring the Lord of heaven. He was justified, as a believer in a Saviour to come ; and loved in his heart that righteous way of God, which was every moment mocked and

¹ Judges xviii. 24.

² 2 Peter ii. 7.

scorned by the men of Sodom. If God then was dear to him, how dreadful to see God thus set at nought! If he had taken delight in the words of prayer and praise around Abram's altar, how deep the anguish of hearing that gracious Being, who was the object of this continual supplication and thanksgiving, blasphemed day by day!

Holiness, and therefore peace dwelled in Abram's tent: but sin, and therefore misery were with Lot in the tents of Sodom. And what shall be that Christian's state of trial, whose guilty avarice of wealth has led him where he must exchange the language of heaven, uttered by Saints of God around him, for the Shibboleth of hell; for a tone of conversation more befitting what we may imagine to be the interchange of mind among lost and condemned Spirits, than of men under a dispensation of mercy? What shall be the grief of that Christian, whose covetousness hath beguiled him from men who adorned the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things, by lives of exemplary holiness, to sojourn among those who break commandments of the Most High, as if it mattered not his wrath, and challenged him to do his worst? Are these the changes

Which the love of money should seduce those who are redeemed from their vain conversation, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ? Is it thus a Christian must hope, that the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep his heart and mind by Christ Jesus? Is it thus he must expect that holy, near, calm, and undisturbed fellowship with the Father, and the Son, which unites the blessedness of a purer world, with the toils and tears of Christian conflict upon earth?

Either a believer's holy hatred of the awful abominations around him must be diminished, and the heart of the life of God in experimental religion eaten away by the contamination to which he has fastened himself, like a living healthy man to a dead and putrid carcase; or else his soul must be daily vexed and distressed. *Love* must make him mourn over sinners, thus madly destroying themselves, and casting away from them the mighty salvation of God, as a thing of no price. *Zeal* for that God, whose he is, and whom he has vowed to serve, must awaken his grief to see infinite mercy despised, infinite power defied, infinite patience mocked, and the inestimable ransom of the blood of

Christ trampled under foot by men, as they pass in their godless merriment along the highway of Satan, and to the chambers of eternal death. The peace of religion is to be found in the tents of the faithful; but all the best sympathies of a gracious heart, yearning over men for their salvation, will be shocked and goaded to anguish by the contradiction of sinners against the invitations of the Holy Ghost, and the Attonement of the cross. "*O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears; then I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*"¹ Thou therefore, man of God, flee those unhallowed associations unless indeed his providence shall manifestly appear to lead thee amongst them: and when thou sojournest among these tabernacles of sin, watch and pray that thy soul enter them not, to have communion with the wickedness of those who dwell in them, except it may be to do them good. Plead with God earnestly for their behalf; if peradventure He may bring them to the knowledge of the truth, that they may be saved. But "*be not partaker with other men's sins: keep thyself pure.*"²

¹ Jerem. ix. 1.² 1 Tim. v. 22.

(3.) *Lot was eventually delivered from the snare of Sodom; yet with the loss of all, for which he had ventured to dwell there.* He was surely warned by a providence of no ordinary kind, not to return thither, after the valour of Abram had delivered him from captivity, and rescued his goods, and the women also, and the people. But the warning was lost upon him. His heart was drugged with worldliness; so that his chastisement and deliverance failed, at that time, to arouse him from the spiritual stupefaction into which he had fallen. He went back to Sodom: and even when God declared that he would destroy the place, Lot still lingered, and would have died in his most guilty unwillingness to depart, if the angel of Jehovah had not taken hold of his arm, in unsearchable grace, and said, "*Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*"¹ He did escape, and found a sure refuge in Zoar; but his wife, his sons-in-law, his property, perished by the fire from heaven. He is now punished, through every one of his former snares. Surely herein is an accumulation of

¹ Gen. xix. 17.

grief, and herein we read, how true it is, that when the Lord takes up the rod, he can make sick in smiting. Lot was a brand, plucked out of the burning, and that only by Abram's prayer. Such too may be the experience of those who imitate the low and carnal views that led him into the vale of Sodom. God, if they are his possession, in the everlasting covenant of love, will at length deliver them; but it *may* be, and it probably *will* be, with a chastisement so stern, and bereavements of outward and inward comforts so mournful, as to bring them down with sorrow, and self-loathing, and with privations of gracious comfort, even to the very grave. If direct and easily interpreted providences appear to lead the servants of God into a land of sin; or if their desire to promote the honour of the Saviour, and the salvation of souls, carry them forth into kingdoms of iniquity;—if they wish there to be witnesses for the Redeemer, and to hold aloft the banner of the cross, calling men to behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, they may expect, that their outward and inward sacrifices and troubles will be counterpoised and recompensed, by peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. But they who leave the guidance of

the cloudy pillar, to share the portion of that good, which the wicked enjoy, even if they should not eventually make absolute shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, will pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

The greatest historian of antiquity¹ observes, that the barrenness of the soil of Attica preserved it quiet and undisturbed, through the longest space of time, in one uninterrupted series of possessors; while wealthier lands, exposed to foreign attack and civil dissension, were early ruined between both. Even so, Lot's guilty desire to be rich brought him into temptation and a snare: and, had not God interposed, would have cast him into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which would have drowned him in destruction and perdition. His uncle on the other hand was blessed, as manifestly, as Lot was afflicted and scourged. I turn then to consider

(II.) THE PROVIDENCES WHICH BEFEL ABRAM.

That is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance: "*My God is able to supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by*

¹ Thucyd. Book I. Sect. 2.

Christ Jesus."¹ The friend of God had, by anticipation, a most happy and heart-cheering experience of its truth, at the very moment when some especial solace must have been wanting to uphold him.

(1.) *He was immediately favoured by a gracious visit and communication from God.* It is emphatically said to have been vouchsafed, "after that Lot was departed from him." In a similar spirit of tender compensation, the Saviour, long afterwards said to the disciples whose hearts died within them at the prospect of his approaching departure, "*I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.*"² Abram is now in a barren land; but Jehovah is his portion. The everlasting Word is his Shepherd, he cannot want. John was in the Isle called Patmos, for the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ. But in that solitude he was blessed with the high and glorious visions of the Apocalypse; and saw the Son of God, as He had never been beheld, and as He never shall be seen, until He shall come again in his glory, and all his holy angels with Him. How much more happy, how unmeasurably more

¹ Phil. iv. 9.

² John xiv. 18.

dearable the peace enjoyed by Abram, through these gracious manifestations made by the Word to his mind in its solitude, than the situation of Lot, amidst all the fertility of the plain of Jordan—even if that plain had been, as some imagined, the very garden of God itself.

Here was balm indeed, to cure the wound made by the selfishness of Lot. Such comfort was needed; and Abram has it in all its preciousness. Lot was no sooner departed, than Jehovah comes in his stead. Personal knowledge of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in Christ Jesus,—personal communion with them, are the best testimonies of the life of God within the soul. Sometimes He comes to comfort it under distresses; sometimes to sanctify its spiritual enjoyments. He is often manifested in the hour of temptation; and his presence is often discoverable, by the consolation and relief unexpectedly brought in the time of need. He comes indeed with such unquestionable evidence, who it is that approaches, and with what amazing tenderness, that the Christian is compelled to cry, “*It is the voice of my beloved;*” “*Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest myself unto me, and not unto the*

world?"¹ He comes in those spiritual discoveries, which give the secret pledge of the approaching and everlasting display of his excellence and his love, when they whom He now visits, to give them songs in the night of their sorrow, shall see Him as He is, and resemble Him in glory. And, come when He may, it is to leave a blessing behind Him. A christian may be in a weary solitude, far from religious friends, far from endearing intercourse with those to whom his heart clings, and is bound, by the strongest and most hallowed ties of earthly affection. He may say, as he sees them depart, "*Ye will leave me alone;*" but it is his high privilege to add, as he sees also the new and living way into the holiest, for communion with God, by the blood of Jesus—"*Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.*"² The affinities of nature, and the charities of life may be rent asunder: but the bond which unites him to his Heavenly Father, cannot be broken; and nothing shall separate him—I say not from the love of God—but from the full persuasion of that love, brought into his heart by fellowship with heaven, if he seek, and if he

¹ Cant. v. 2. John xiv. 22.

² John viii. 16.

Spread forth the affections of his heart to enjoy that communion.

Ye who have thus known the Saviour's preciousness, in gracious intercourse with Him by faith, put forth the exercises of that faith, to expect Him at all times, and especially when your trials may abound: and so be persuaded that you will be raised above them, by divine consolations, as the ark above the waters of the deluge, by the hand of God. Thus condescendingly and familiarly walking with you by the way, He will give sweetness to every joy; not only sanctify every sorrow, but deprive it of its sting, and make it unable to cast you down in feebleness of spirit, and sinful mourning before God. Seek Him whom your soul loveth; and you will assuredly find Him, and with him the peace of God.

(2) Abram had in this visit of Jehovah, *a renewal of all the promises, by which his faith had been upheld and strengthened in following God.* Christian trust is continually called to rest upon a promise; but if the manifestations of God to the heart, in his covenant faithfulness, are not often renewed, faith is apt to become feeble, until there seem to be only a handful of meal in the barrel, and a drop of oil in the

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Therefore it is that God unveils his
to his waiting, and almost fainting ser-
vants; and saith unto them, "Fear not, I am
your salvation." God said to Abraham, "Lift
up thine eyes, and look from the place where
thou art, northward, and southward, and east-
ward, and westward; for all the land which
thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy
seed for ever. And I will make thy seed, as
the dust of the earth, so that if a man can num-
ber the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed
also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land
in the length of it, and in the breadth of it;
for I will give it unto thee." Abram is a man
of faith; but he is bidden to lift up his eyes,
and look with a larger and closer observation
upon the heritage, in which God had instated
him. It is entirely his own: and the more
narrowly he examines it, the more will he be
smitten with its loveliness; the more effec-
tually carried out of himself, and out of the
intermediate sorrows of his pilgrimage, to
in that consolation, which is so freely
and so unalienably secured.

If they who believe in the appoint-
ment, to the saving of the soul, would

into and understand the beauty of that house of God, wherein their happy lot is cast, even the Church, built upon its living corner stone, they must not give merely a slight and hasty regard to the general structure, but must enter into its detail, follow its magnificence, from one chamber of beauty to another, and search out what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of the love of Christ which it contains, until they understand it minutely; and hunger and thirst, as becomes the children of light, to be filled with all the fulness of God.

"Arise, walk through the land." Abram was to examine it fully; to see its brooks and water-springs; its stones of iron, and its hills, out of which brass might be digged; to know that it was a land flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands. And ye, who would not remain strangers to any part of your vast inheritance, the land of exceeding great, precious, and unchangeable promise, be your own spies: and search it out by diligent inquisition. Rest not contented to study it, even in that accurate map afforded you by the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures. But let an experimental religion, enkindled and maintained by the eternal Spirit in your hearts, make you deeply

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anted with the surface of the field, and
treasure contained in it.

that Christians knew how much of life,
ce, happiness, strength, joy, stability in
h, they lose for want of walking in holy
ervation through Immanuel's land, that
ver-smiling country which He hath died to
give them! Of how much glory is He de-
frauded, by their want of active and practical
search into the happiness of their spiritual pos-
session, as He has made it over to them in the
everlasting covenant of his love! "Walk
about Zion, and go round about her: tell the
towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks,
consider her palaces;" not only to enjoy your
own present and eternal portion in their beauty
and glory, but to tell them that come after
that they likewise may become followers of ye
as ye also are of Christ. Thus survey ye
goodly heritage in the Church of God;
that which hath been hard to suffer in the
of life, will become much more tolerable:
very delightful will be the remembrance,
you shall have finally entered the ark, with
saints of Christ at his coming again,

hand of God shall have shut you in, and ye shall go no more out for ever. “*All things are yours, whether of the world, or life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's.*”¹ And is not this an inventory which ye should lift up your eyes to examine, a land of good, which you should arise and walk through, with ever unfatigued, ever new delight?

I. If the distinctions of Abram were great, amidst all his trials, and his communion with God endearing, in those misty and more dim periods of the infancy and non-age of the Church, *how much more blessed the believer's position, when he is called into the Mount Zion of the Gospel prospect, and sees his spiritual portion as there exhibited in the light and lustre of accomplished redemption?* Abram had only a Pisgah view of the true land of promise; even when he walked through the visible Canaan. They who believe, in this noon-day of the Redeemer's manifested love, are privileged to behold what no eye of elder saint had seen, no ear of ancient believer heard, neither had it entered into the heart even of Abram, in

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 22.

the brightest day of divine revelation made to him, fully to conceive. "*God hath provided some better thing for us; that they without us should not be made perfect.*"¹

But to whom much is given, from them will much be required. If the magnificent prospect of an evangelical heritage dwell brightly in our eye, it should *enlighten* our hearts; it should *fill* our hearts, who feel it to be our own, and make us desire to walk worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory.

II. If this portion of the history of Abram has been properly examined, it teaches one plain, obvious, and most momentous lesson, both to the sinner and to the saint:—*That "godliness is profitable for all things: having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."*² Abram leaves the richer portion for Lot, and is contented with that which is worse: but then Jehovah comes to be his portion, and to satisfy him with the exceeding abundance of mercy and love. Lot's gain lasts but a little time, and then perishes in the fires of Sodom. Abram's part is unchangeable. His comforts are increased, his fame is spread

¹ Heb. xi. 40.

² Tim. iv. 8.

abroad, and his holy familiarity with God becomes more frequent and more uninterrupted. It will ever thus be found by all true Christian experience. It will assuredly be learned, that Jesus was the faithful and true Witness when He said, "*Every one who hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*"¹ Arise then, ye who are partakers of Abram's holy faith, and walk through the land of your salvation, in the length and breadth of its present blessedness, as well as of that which shall be imparted, when you shall be no more sojourners, but be made actually possessors of the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. And whensoever you sit down, after this close and active examination of faith, frequently repeated, remember the covenant God of all your mercies. In every plain of Mamre, where you may be providentially called to dwell, set up an altar of praise to Jehovah. Ground it firmly in love; build it high and strong in faith; and enjoy the privilege of communing with God before it, in the experimental life of his grace.

¹ Matt. xix. 29.

SERMON XVII.

ABRAHAM AND MELCHIZEDEK.

GENESIS XIV. 18—20.

AND MELCHIZEDEK KING OF SALEM BROUGHT FOR
AND WINE: AND HE WAS THE PRIEST OF THE
GOD. AND HE BLESSED HIM, AND SAID, BLESSED
OF THE MOST HIGH GOD, POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN
AND BLESSED BE THE MOST HIGH GOD WHEN
VERED THINE ENEMIES INTO THINE HAND.
HIM TITHES OF ALL.

THE moon revolves around the earth
of force fixed and invariable; but
under a variety of aspects in different
her orbit. It is thus with a Christian
world. "His life is hid with Christ
"He is kept by the power of God
faith unto salvation." But the
circumstances at one period
course, are extremely unlike

is at other times placed, according to the will of his Heavenly Father. Yet however greatly they may differ to the eye of sense, they all—and that invariably, work together for his good. The history of Abram may serve to exemplify this remark. We have seen him a stranger, and a man of peace in Canaan; with no other defence than the horns of the altar, which he had erected in faith, and dedicated to the honour of Jehovah. We are now to regard him as a warrior, taking up arms to deliver the oppressed, and to snatch the prey out of the hand of the mighty. Here however, as in former exhibitions of his character, we find him actuated by the same dispositions, and consistent in the holy principles of his conduct. And his example should be followed through all the varieties of Christian experience. If the love of God be shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, there is a happy unity of principle with the will of the Most High, to regulate the sincere disciple in all the contingencies of life, and to preserve him the same man, according to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, “in all time of his tribulation, and in all time of his wealth.”

A pregnant instance of this truth will appear,

by noticing, from the chapter now under review,

I. ABRAM'S VICTORY OVER THE CONFEDERATED KINGS.

It does not seem probable, that Lot was actively engaged as a party in this war, by joining the people among whom he dwelt, in their resistance to the invasion of Chedorlaomer. He was not on that account, however, to escape the general injury and violence. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell. "*Their goods, and all their victuals were taken. The spoilers also took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.*"¹ No sooner did tidings of this disaster reach Abram, from one who had escaped the slaughter and captivity, than he immediately prepared for the rescue of his kinsman. All the selfishness of Lot is forgotten: his danger alone is remembered: and with the prompt intrepidity of a man, whose life was that of habitual faith and dependance upon God, Abram resolves to follow and give battle to the five kings, with only his domestic servants, trained in his family; and (through the divine blessing) to deliver his nephew.

¹ Gen. xiv. 11, 12.

And wheresoever this gracious confidence upon the Most High is in vigorous exercise, there will its possessor be strong, and do exploits. Faith is a valiant grace. It precipitated Gideon, in the might of God, upon the hosts of Midian, with three hundred men ; and gained him a triumph over them. It is the high and animating principle of the believer in his warfare against the principalities and powers of sin. "*This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*"¹ The world, the flesh, and devil are confederated kings ; and if they are to be vanquished, the Christian warrior must take to himself "*the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, and the shield of faith whereby he may quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*"² Abram had no might against the great company, which yet he adventured to follow ; but his eyes were upon God ; and therefore his heart was bold. Jehovah was his Banner ; and hence he went forth, conquering and to conquer. The faith that glowed so brightly in his heart was an assurance of victory : and his covenant God amply redeemed the pledge committed to him, together with the grace of this high confidence.

¹ 1 John v. 4.² Eph. vi. 16, 17.

Abram is the worthy example of all his spiritual children, the heirs of the same promise. It *may* happen—and alas, how frequently *does* it happen, that some who are dear to the Christian's heart, and cherished by his tenderest love, turn aside to dwell among the tents of ungodliness, and are there made captives by Satan! Shall the adversary then be allowed to carry them away, without blow struck, or effort made for their deliverance? Shall not the soldier of the cross, who hath in his own person fought and foiled the adversary, gird himself for the battle, and go forth, in the name and strength of the Lord of Hosts, to bring back the captive, (as the power of restoring love may bless the effort) to his forsaken rest, and peace, and portion? No offence which an erring brother may have committed—no provocation which he may have given—no selfishness, whereby he may have violated the sanctuary of relative obligation, whatever be its stipulated or general demands, must be for a moment remembered. That brother is in the way of the destroyer: and if we have learned the power of redeeming love, we shall no more hesitate to strive and pray for his deliverance, than did Joseph to help his brethren, and do

them good, after the wrong which he had suffered at their hands. If an example be needful, we find it in the conduct of the Son of God. Man had revolted from Jehovah, and robbed Him of the honour due to all his attributes. Man was a captive, lost and undone, in the hand of his mighty enemy. But then the Redeemer hastened to deliver him : then the Redeemer burst asunder every link of his slavery, in the power of a victorious salvation ; and made him free indeed. “ *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*”¹

Abram in this victory shadowed forth the presence and might of our Lord in his church, for the deliverance of its members ; when otherwise, being led into temptation and a snare, they would be in danger of widely and awfully departing from God. Abram’s conquest of the kings was not only a pledge of that amazing victory, which the Church, in its glorious Head should obtain over the world ; but also of its usefulness to the world, whensoever men will admit its help and kindness. “ *The remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, in the midst of many people, as a lion among the*

¹ 1 John iv. 11.

*beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who if he go through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver."*¹

In this victory, attesting so undeniably the help of Him, whose Almightyness breaks the shield, the sword, and the battle of such as oppose the objects of his love, Abram had a pledge and security of regality over the land of Canaan. It was already his own by right of promise; and now he obtains a further seizin, by right of conquest, in connexion with the inviolable truth of God. When Moses, in a later period of the history of redemption, vanquished and slew the Egyptian who smote one of his brethren, he thought that God by his hand would deliver Israel; and he thought rightly. It was the first-fruit of all his victories; the first step that led the armies of God out of the house of their bondage. It may be also the Christian's comfort, and a gracious light of hope within his heart, when he can thank God for giving him the victory over any temptation, that the Head and Captain of his salvation is thus foreshewing to him the destruction of all

¹ Micah vi. 8.

his enemies: assuring him that Satan shall be bruised under his feet shortly; and that he shall attain the rest of his everlasting inheritance. Such a soldier of Christ should hail that victory as a pledge of a final triumph. It is the ground on which to erect an Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped me." It is the mount of praise, as well as of prospect, on which he should "thank God and take courage."

The same graceful disinterestedness, whereby the father of the faithful exhibited the holy superiority of his principles, when he yielded the fruitful vale of Sodom to the covetousness of Lot, is again manifested in this great victory. "*The king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. And Abram said unto him, I have lifted mine hand unto the Lord, the most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread, even to a shoe latchet; (or, from a girl's hair-fillet to a man's shoe-tie) lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.*"¹ Instances of such generosity are, alas, very rare, even among those who profess to have all things

¹ Gen. xiv. 21—23.

in Christ. Were it otherwise, the religion of a self-denying Saviour would be more abundantly honoured in the world. Would to God, that the heavenly contentedness which a conscious possession of divine and unchangeable love is calculated to produce, were more duly appreciated, and more justly admired! Would to God, that such a holy disregard of the selfish cravings of our poor fallen nature, did more frequently attest the mightiness of that principle, which, assuring the Christian that all things are his, would also attest, not only his calm repose, but his deep delight in those unsearchable riches which the world can neither give nor take away!

We are now conducted by the history to notice,

II. THE PATRIARCH'S INTERVIEW WITH MELCHIZEDEK.

No man can contemplate the wonders of salvation with a spiritual eye, who will not feel his heart's fulness urging him to exclaim, "*Great is the mystery of godliness!*"¹ So many circumstances crowd upon the mind, when it ranges through the plan and history of Re-

¹ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

demption, whether before or after the Eternal Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, that the view is almost overwhelming. And assuredly there were few more profound truths which faith was called to contemplate, among those which pointed forth the Lord of glory, before He assumed our nature, than Melchizedek's visit to Abram. We may in some degree infer the thickness of the veil drawn around this secret and wonderful person, from the conjectures made concerning him, and the arguments whereby they are defended.

Among the Jews it was an almost universal opinion, that he was Shem the son of Noah, who is asserted by such as adopt the short chronology of the Hebrew Pentateuch, to have survived Abram, though born a considerable time before the flood. Of this opinion are many able and learned writers among the great theologians of more modern times, and of the English Church. But this opinion, together with the chronological theory upon which it is founded, appears to be encompassed with almost insuperable difficulties. According to the most approved system of sacred computation, Shem must have died four hundred and forty years before the birth of Abram. The

principal argument, drawn from a declaration in the blessing of Noab, that Canaan should be the servant of Shem, which blessing, Shem, as its depository, is made to repeat in the person of him who is called Melchizedek, is a foundation too narrow for the superstructure. The genealogy of Shem was minutely recorded ; while Melchizedek is said to be without father, and without mother, when the great Apostle brings him under the notice of the Hebrew Church. And as Levi, not less than Abram, through whom he came, was descended from Shem, while it is testified of Melchizedek, that his descent was not the same with that of the Aaronic priesthood, this supposition, however ingeniously urged, is untenable.

Some heretics in the early church affirmed, that Melchizedek was the Holy Ghost. But this mysterious character is said to be a priest of the Most High God : and every High Priest is taken from among men. If therefore the Holy Ghost was a Priest unto God, He would therein be inferior to God. Moreover the Holy Ghost never descended from heaven to be incarnate ; but only the Son of God. Others again, among whom is the accomplished, but

fanciful Origen, regard him as an angel; but without any measure of convincing proof. By a fourth class, he is thought to have been one of the kings of Canaan, marvellously raised up of God, and gifted with a most peculiar priesthood, for the very purpose, as it would appear, of bestowing a solemn blessing upon Abram, for the confirmation of his faith, and the comfort of his mind. By these commentators, Melchizedek is made an illustrious type of Immanuel, in his Everlasting Priesthood, and in the royalty of his office, as King of Righteousness, and King of Peace. It must be acknowledged, that by far the greatest number of Christian writers in all ages of the church—that divines of all shades of opinion, and all degrees of learning, have adopted the conclusion, that Melchizedek, who came down, as it were from heaven, an insulated being, just flashing upon us a radiance, wherein we discover the Regal and Eternal Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ brightly represented, and then leaving all dark again, was a man; and only a man; although greatly privileged, as an eminent representative of the Eternal High Priest of our profession.

Such was long, and until lately, my own

view of Abram's wondrous visitant; but subsequent reflection has induced me to adopt the opinion of those who deem him to have been none other than the Angel of the everlasting covenant, manifest in the likeness of man, by a special privilege and dispensation in the patriarch's behalf. The subject is confessedly difficult; and may well demand that the maintainers of different opinions should each hold his own in the bond of peace; since none of the principal hypotheses violate the unity of the Spirit, or impugn any portion of the truth as it is in Jesus. I may be permitted to mention a few of the reasons which have operated on my own mind; and leave them, in dependence on that Spirit which is promised to lead the believer into all truth.¹

The supposition that Melchizedek was a prince who reigned in Jerusalem, then called Salem, is opposed by a serious *geographical* difficulty. Jerusalem, at that time, and for centuries afterwards, was known by the name of Jebuz: and it would be hard to say, in what satisfactory manner we may account for the

¹ The subject is ably discussed by Cunnus de Republica Hebræorum; Biddulph's Theology of the Early Patriarchs; and Faber's Homo Moësis, to which the reader is referred.

fact how a royal prince, owning Jehovah, and acting as a priest of the Most High God, could dwell amidst these idolaters of Canaan in safety, and all the while be unknown to Abram, who could not be very remote from the seat of his government. Why indeed would there have been a necessity, so to speak, that Abram should be singled out as the depository of the truth of God, and as its dispenser to the peculiar race that was to preserve it from perishing, as afterwards the manna was laid up in the most holy place, so long as Melchizedek was already favoured with the blessing of that knowledge, and privileged to possess it? If however, it be said, with St. Jerome, that Salem was the northern city of that name, identical with Sichem, then almost the first step that Abram took into the promised land, must have been into the very heart of Melchizedek's territory, where he reigned and worshipped God. (Gen. xii. 6.) Yet we hear of no friendship, no acquaintance, no mutual assistance, no reciprocities of kindness between them; notwithstanding the eager desire which the friend of God must have felt to cultivate a sacred intimacy with one so highly honoured of the Most High, as this remarkable man.

That two such characters, so amazingly singled out by a divine hand, from all the rest of the human race, should have been thus placed, and yet thus estranged from each other, from a community of worship, and an interchange of fellowship equally consolatory to themselves, and important to the diffusion of the knowledge of God, is, to say the least, hard to be understood.

Neither is it easy to imagine, from any thing apparent in the sacred record, in what manner the priesthood of Melchizedek, royal as it was, could have been so much more glorious than that of Abram, the friend of God, the heir of the world, the centre of gracious convergency to so many exceeding great and precious promises; and himself also a priest of Jehovah, according to the patriarchal economy;—one who had built an altar to God; who had solemnly called upon his name, and who was afterwards to exhibit himself in the light of a sacerdotal character so awful, in the offering of his son upon mount Moriah.¹ One was the father of the

¹ If the future Jerusalem was the seat of Melchizedek's royalty. Abram must, on his journey to the holy mount, have passed close beneath its walls; and could he have so done, without an attempt to see and converse with his distinguished brother in the priesthood?

faithful, the progenitor of the Messiah, while the other was only an obscure prince of Canaan: and truly if the less be blessed of the better, then would it seem more fitting that Melchizedek should be blessed of Abram, than that he should confer that blessing upon him.

St. Paul, bringing this illustrious personage before the Hebrew Church,¹ and expatiating upon the singular dignity wherewith he was invested, declares that he was "*without father, without mother, without descent, (or pedigree) having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, abides a priest continually, (to all eternity.)*"² It is generally understood, that as no record is given of the parentage or genealogy, the birth or death of Melchizedek, he might be said to have none; that as a veil of impenetrable darkness and silence is drawn over these first and last events he was thus, both in person and priesthood, a type of the person and priesthood of Him, "*which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty*"—God in our nature.

But is not this negative mode of dealing with the subject meagre and unsatisfactory?

¹ Heb. vii. 3.

² εἰς τὸ διηνεκές, vide Heb. x. 12.

Allowing—as we must necessarily allow, for the meanness of the type compared with the glory of the antitype, is it possible to acquiesce without a feeling of disappointment in such a mode of exemplifying what St. Paul has said of Christ's eternal priesthood? Shall we be contented with Chrysostom's remark upon this defect of genealogy? He makes it point out a mystery sublime, as distinguished from the carefully recorded pedigrees of the Aaronic priesthood. He bids us not to understand the Scriptures literally, as though Melchizedek had neither father nor mother; but rather as speaking of an extraordinary man; without signifying his beginning, end, line, or race; that so he might the more fully typify the person and excellency of Christ, who, as He was God, was without mother, and without father, as He was man; without beginning of days, because his goings forth have been from of old, even from everlasting; and without end of years, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, an Eternal High Priest of the Church? Can the apostle's description of his Redeemer's sacerdotal character be fulfilled in its length and breadth of meaning, by this vague and negative reference to a mere mortal man? Or must we not rather

at once imagine that he who met Abram, blessed him, and received tithes at his hand, was the Angel of the everlasting covenant, in one of those amazing manifestations which He vouchsafed to the father of the faithful, and repeated at the oak of Mamre? If we admit the divinity of Abram's mysterious host, He is at once without father or mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life. As such, He is made like the Son of God, a previous exhibition of the Lord of glory in our flesh and nature.

But it may be asked, does the Scripture afford any reasonable ground that a king and priest really called Melchizedek ever existed? Moses says that, "Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought forth bread and wine." St. Paul says, that he was by interpretation, king of righteousness, and after that also king of Salem, which is king of peace. There seems no very valid reason, why the original term, (Melechsalem) should be translated, king of Salem, while Melchizedek is left untranslated. It is argued that both, or neither, should have been rendered into English indifferently; and that the verse should have been read, "Melchizedek Melechsalem brought forth bread and

wine;" or else, that "the king of righteousness and king of peace" came thus furnished and provided to meet the patriarch. It is asserted that *Salem* is no more in this place the name of a city than *Zedek*. Why then, it is asked, should St. Paul so anxiously insist upon the meaning of these two proper names? Why should he so decidedly declare that the name of this mysterious being was first by interpretation, king of righteousness; and after that, also king of Salem, which is king of peace? Not, in all probability, because there ever was a prince so named, who reigned in Jerusalem, as the cotemporary of Abram; but because these appellations were descriptive of the Great High Priest's character; even as the Divine Word was named Immanuel; because He was God with us; or Jehovah Zedeknu; because in all the momentous work of human justification, He is the Lord our Righteousness: or Sar-Salem, the Prince of Peace; because He hath reconciled us to God by his blood. According to this view, the words of Moses should be rendered "The King of righteousness, even the King of peace, brought forth bread and wine: and He was the priest of the Most High God: and He blessed him, and said, Blessed be

Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth." And this description, which excludes the idea of mere humanity in Him who blessed Abram, is strictly conformable to the reasoning of St. Paul, who makes both titles descriptive and translateable.

David declares of Messiah, "*Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek:*"¹ and this prophetic assertion is repeatedly pressed by St. Paul upon the Hebrews, with the same high and solemn appropriation. He also asserts of the Lord Jesus Christ, that "*because He continueth ever, He hath an unchangeable priesthood.*"² That immutability must arise from the eternity of the High Priest; although his sacerdotal office commenced in act only, when the first victim was offered to typify and shadow forth the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. Indeed on the supposition, that a mere man, however exalted in rank and office, met Abram and blessed him, and received tithes from him; the whole reasoning of St. Paul, pressed as it is upon the Church, in language the most sublime and glorious, is exceedingly difficult of interpretation.

¹ Psalm cx. 4.

² Heb. vii. 24.

But if instead of such a man, we regard the regal priest as the Word of God, that difficulty appears to be very considerably diminished.

But how are we to understand the words, "*after the order,*" and again, "*after the similitude, of Melchizedek?*"¹ Do they not imply difference, and thus destroy the identity of Him, of whom Moses speaks, with God incarnate, as described by St. Paul? It may be answered, that the likeness consists, "not in a difference of persons, but in a sameness of attributes, and is borne out by other expressions of similar meaning. Thus Christ is said to have been "*in the form of God;*"² that is, not distinct from Deity; but possessing all his perfections. So, when He "*took upon Him the form of a servant,*"³ we understand that He became the servant of God, and the minister of mercy to a guilty and dying world. When it is predicated of the Lord Jesus Christ that "*He was made in the likeness of men,*" we must understand the absolute oneness with human nature which He assumed. By parity of reasoning then, it may appear, that the similitude between Melchizedek and the Son of God, concerning which

¹ Heb. vii. 15, 17.

² Phil. ii. 6.

³ Ib. ii. 7.

St. Paul speaks, consisted in the absolute sameness of their priestly character: and that Christ Himself is a Priest after his own order, which by its very constitution admits only of a single priest. On this ground, Christ and Melchizedek are one Person, and the order of Melchizedek is truly the order of Christ. He, of whom it is witnessed that He liveth, King of righteousness and King of peace, would seem to be identical with Jesus, of whom like mention is made, that He continueth ever the single High Priest of an eternal designation, to whom Abram paid tithes in proof of inferiority: and to whom, when he raised his head from the stone of Bethel, Jacob in after days vowed the tenth of all his substance as an offering, through Him to the Most High God: whose sacerdotal office is the hope and stay of the Church; because He is able to save to the uttermost, all those who come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them: and who shall, in the accomplished period of Jehovah's counsel, come forth from the most holy place above, to bless his worshippers, and to be the substance of his own blessing to them for ever.

But I turn to say a few words upon

III. THE CONDUCT OF MELCHIZEDEK
TOWARDS ABRAM.

He was king of peace—that peace which was effected between an insulted God and rebel men, upon the mount of crucifixion. He was also by interpretation, king of righteousness, and thus shadowed forth his great and glorious office, the Lord our Righteousness, the Lord our Peace, because, having brought in an everlasting righteousness by his obedience unto death, and in death, He hath reconciled man to God, making peace by the blood of his cross;—“*made sin for us (while He knew no sin), that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*”¹ The work of this unblemished, this unchangeable righteousness is peace, and its effect, when brought home by faith upon the heart, is quietness and assurance for ever. And the Church of God hath no more ample, no more stable, no more delightful ground of trust and boasting in its Almighty Head, than the great truth thus involved in the Atonement, Intercession, and blessing, of that Great High Priest, who is “*made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.*”²

¹ 2 Cor. v. 21.

This mysterious personage is represented as a King in dignity, and a Priest of the Most High God in office. Herein He is contradistinguished from all the Aaronic priesthood, to none of whom was royalty ever vouchsafed. And such a High Priest, a Priest upon his throne, became men, whose lost condition, He left his throne of glory to repair, with an everlasting salvation, and to make them kings and priests unto God, “*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.*”¹ Such a King then governs, such a High Priest is set over the house of God, who can defend it by his Almightyness, and whose infinitely precious mediation, carrying with it the everlasting worth and sweetness of his own all-sufficient oblation, secures answers of mercy from the throne of a reconciled God, and grace to help in time of need; with the happy assurance, that they who seek it in faith, love; holiness, shall be kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.

As a king however, did Melchizedek in an especial manner act, when he brought forth bread and wine, to comfort and invigorate

¹ 1 Peter ii. 9.

Abram, returning from the slaughter of the kings. Thus did Barzillai and his friends, in after days, bring food for David, and for the people that were with him to eat: for they said, "The people is hungry, and thirsty, and weary in the wilderness." And thus in a pre-eminent degree doth the King of Righteousness, even the King of Peace, now fulfilling that office, and of whose coming a shadow was cast before, in this amazing meeting, bring forth spiritual refreshment to those soldiers of the cross who are arrayed in his army of saints, when they would otherwise faint with the toil of their way, and with the severity of their conflict. It does not satisfy his ample love and tender care to give them the victory, and then suffer them to droop and fail, forespent with the battle past, and dreading, lest grace should not be left them for another onset. No: He gives the oil of gladness by his Comforter, to make them of a cheerful countenance; and the wine that He hath mingled, which maketh glad the heart of man; and bread, the staff of life, to strengthen their hearts. In that conflict which the new and living principle of salvation must maintain with inward sinfulness, banded with the principalities and powers of evil—in that

battle which the believer must wage against foes in his own heart, and against the world, the flesh, and the devil without him, he shall be met by his great Redeemer; and to him shall be brought forth by hands of readiest love, that unspeakably reviving banquet, upon which faith delights to feed—the flesh of the Son of Man, which is meat indeed, and his blood, which is drink indeed. The Saviour's honour, name, and glory, are all concerned, not only in the safety, but in the ample sustenance of his militant brethren; not only in preventing the gates of hell from prevailing against them; but in promoting their righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The bread and wine thus given to Abram by the righteous and peaceful king who met and succoured him, might be regarded as an additional security to Jehovah's promise of the land; even as the grapes of Eschcol were the first fruits of Canaan, to those believing spies who brought them home. In like manner, the joys awaiting the Christian after every successful conflict, in the communications of the Saviour's unchangeable mercy to his soul, will be a foretaste of the hidden manna—of those joys which are at God's right hand for ever, when the redeemed, sanctified, and

glorified members of the Church shall be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

As a priest, Melchizedek blessed Abram, who had the promises, in the name, and by the especially delegated authority of the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth. In that gracious benediction, were shadowed forth the spiritual distinctions bestowed with supreme power, through the ever prevailing priesthood of the Son of God, upon him, and upon all who walk in the steps of his most holy faith. Where He gives not, there can be no substantial blessing, be the other circumstances of life what they may. Where He meets and gives, there is indeed a communication of sustaining, consoling, rejoicing mercy; and concerning the meanest or feeblest of his disciples, doth He say, in the fulness of mediatorial power, as Isaac concerning Jacob, "*I have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed.*"¹

Thus refreshed, distinguished, and blessed, Abram gave to his mysterious host, tithes of all the spoils taken from the enemy in battle. The armour of conquered kings and generals was devoted by warriors, in the world's earlier

¹ Gen. xxvii. 33.

history to the idol whom they especially worshipped, or to the tutelary deity of their country. The honoured head of the Church, in like wise, offered his tenth of the first fruits of battle, and probably of all he had beside, to the King of Righteousness and Peace, thus prefiguring his promised advent to the world, and his stupendous work of mercy in it. These tithes were an offering of gratitude to the Lord; as such they were owned and accepted of Him. And while our high Melchizedek imparts such gracious views of Himself, and fills his confiding followers, in their warfare, with all the fulness of God, in his communications of mercy—while He gives them the rich provision of his constant love, and cries, “*Eat, O my friends, and drink, yea drink abundantly, O my beloved,*”¹ their hearts will expand with thankfulness, (the gift of his Holy Spirit,) for the divine glory, and their own happiness; and they will delight, in the cordial reciprocity of holy gratitude, to give what they have to Him. All they possess is, with themselves, the right of God: in Christ, by creation, by gift, by purchase, and by the conquest of his

¹ Cant. v. 1.

grace. It is therefore fitting that He possess it all at their hands, as their reward for service.

But it must not be forgotten, as we contemplate the victory of Abram, and the of Lot, that while the defeated king, and of Sodom and Gomorrah were thus delivered by the patriarch, it was to them only a reprieve from destruction—the mere holding back by God's outstretched hand, by his own long-suffering and pity. The ruin briefly delayed upon them, with an increased emphasis of judgment. The fire from heaven shortly afterwards consumed them: as the waters of the Dead Sea roll their bitterness over a plain once fruitful as the garden of Eden, while they who once defied God in their pride and fulness of bread, are doomed to suffer the judgment of eternal fire. They are the examples of those whom God warns, chastises, corrects, and is unwilling to abandon: but they will not turn when He calls, nor repent: He commands; nor believe when the word of salvation is preached to them, in the Attonement of the Lamb of God. Yet a little while, and their day of mercy will be ended, and the morning of judgment will succeed. Con-

then, ye whom, in impenitence and unbelief the solemn truth may concern, that respite is not remission. The *hand* of God will *perform*, what the *word* of God has *threatened* against his enemies: and for the obdurate there can be no escape. “*Turn ye then, turn ye ; for why will ye die ?*”¹

¹ Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

SERMON XVIII.

JUSTIFYING FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS.

GENESIS XV. 6.

HE BELIEVED IN THE LORD, AND HE COUNTED IT TO HIM
FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

THE promises of God, deposited in the ark of his word, are like the manna laid up in the most holy place of the tabernacle, unchangeable and incorruptible. Yet such is the weakness of faith, in those who nevertheless believe on Him to the saving of the soul, that unless these promises are frequently strengthened by new assurances brought home upon the heart, they appear to lose their virtue, like the manna kept until the morning, not in the tabernacle of God, but in the tents of Israel. Such defect in the patient waiting of faith was felt even by Abram himself. The Most High had solemnly engaged to give him a country, a posterity, and a Saviour. But although he was now a conqueror, he had won no place

In Canaan by his victory. Nearly ten years had elapsed, since the assurance of a family was made, and he was yet childless. The last and greatest of all the promises, to which his soul turned, as to its dearest resting-place—the wonderful Deliverer of mankind—gave not even the most distant sign of a future Advent to the world through his posterity. The unbelief that lurked within him appeared therefore in act, when the word of Jehovah came again to him in a vision, saying, “*Fear not Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*”¹ Abram said, “*Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house, is this Eliezer of Damascus?*” And Abram said, “*Behold to me thou hast given no need: and lo one born in my house is mine heir.* He seems to fear that divine faithfulness would fail; that God would evade his promise; and that instead of a son, born to him from his own loins, he should merely have an adopted child in this Syrian, who had the care of his household and property. Every year of Sarah’s continued barrenness seems to nourish his distrust; and he is not yet brought into that con-

¹ Gen. xv. 1—3.

fidence of faith, whereby "*against hope he believed in hope; that he might be the father of many nations.*"¹ God however condescends to reiterate his assurance, of accomplishing all that He had graciously undertaken. The word of the Lord came unto Abram, saying, "*This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels, shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou art able to number them. And He said unto him, so shall thy seed be.*"² The Holy Spirit of promise sealed the faithfulness of God's assurance upon his heart, and his distrust was subdued." "He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." "I cannot but observe, that this sighing mournful complaint of Abram hath in it much infirmity, and something of distrust. He shakes in the very bottom of his soul, that improbabilities were growing up, as he thought, to impossibilities against him in the way of promise. Yet hence also mark two things: first, that he doth not repine in himself, and keep up his burning thoughts in his breast; but sweetly

¹ Rom. iv. 18.² Gen. xv. 4, 5.

breathes out the burden of his soul into the **bosom** of his God. "Lord God," saith he, "what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" **It** is of sincere faith to unlade our grief into **the** bosom of our God. Secondly, that God **takes** not his servant at the advantage of his **complaining**, and diffidence: but lets that pass; **until** having renewed the promise to him, and **settled** his faith, then He gives in his testimony **that** Abram believes God. The Most High **overlooks** the weakness, and causeless wailings of his servants, takes them at the best, and then affords them the blessing of his testimony to their faith."¹

Here, for the first time, the all-momentous doctrine of justification by faith alone, is brought before us, upon the testimony of the Holy Ghost. Here is the germ of that tree of life to the Church—salvation by the imputed righteousness of Christ, beneath which its members have sat, enjoying its refreshing shadow, and finding its fruit sweet to their taste. These rich clusters would never have been disclosed to human imagination in this passage, if the great Gentile Apostle had not held forth the

¹ Owen's Works, XV. 263.

torch of inspiration whereby to discover them. He makes it the copious and comprehensive test of those wondrous discoveries to himself, by the Spirit of truth in Rom. iv. and Gal. iii.; and by him bequeathed, as a legacy of inestimable worth, to men of every time and nation, into whose hands the Scriptures of salvation should be providentially conveyed. He deduces from it the glorious certainty of the righteousness of God without the law—that is, without the merit of works on the part of man,—“*even the righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe.*”¹ “*Now it was not written for Abram’s sake alone, that this righteousness was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.*”² And therefore, although I have already dwelt at so much length upon faith, as the great impulse of Christian life and holiness; regarding it more immediately as a general affiance in the promises of God, I should be equally wanting towards a proper developement of the character and history of Abraham, and towards the fundamental truth of salvation contained in the

¹ Rom. iii. 22.² Rom. iv. 23, 24.

text, were I to omit its consideration, and fail to press it home, as the one thing needful, for the life and peace of the soul in Jesus Christ. My purpose will be answered, if the Spirit's blessing attend the endeavour, by considering

I. THE ESPECIAL OBJECT OF ABRAM'S FAITH.

I have already expressed my persuasion, that the word of the Lord which appeared to him, was that essentially Divine Word, who "*in the beginning was with God, and was God ;*"¹ who, in the fulness of appointed time, was made flesh, and dwelt among us. Abram knew Him as such, and addressed to Him that awful title of Jehovah, which it were utter blasphemy to offer to the most glorious being whom the hand of God hath ever created. In Him then, even the Lord our Righteousness, did Abram believe ; and it was counted to him for righteousness. This however, as we have seen, was not the first instance in which Abram believed in God : for by faith, when he was called to go out into a place which he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went. Yet we have hitherto had no testimony given by the

¹ John i. 1.

SERMON XVIII.

y Ghost, to his justification, or acceptance
ore God, as a perfectly righteous man in a
ensic sense: nor is his former trust in God
hibited, as an example of justifying faith.
ow, as the promises here given are, with
nall distinctions, only reiterations of those
ready made, it may be enquired, where lies
he difference, between that affiance which led
Abram forth from Ur of the Chaldees, and that
whereby he is now made the righteousness of
God in Christ. The difference lay, not in the
nature, not in the vigour, not in the exercise
of his faith, but in the *object* to which it was
directed, and the centre of rest wherein
dwelt. Heretofore the promises had been
general, and mingled together. Here, there
one specific engagement on the part of God
his believing friend,—an engagement involving
not merely the assurance of a numerous
terity, as was that which descended from
in the course of nature, but of that glorious
seed of the woman, who should spring
him according to the flesh; that union of
head with humanity, to be assumed by
second Person in the blessed Trinity, who
should take upon Himself our nature,
for the world's salvation. To that

and to its wonderful substance, Abram's heart clung, as to its dearest hope, in the sense of sin, and under the deep persuasion, that a Mediator was needed to bear the iniquities of all believers, and to endow them with his own Righteousness, as their sure and inviolable title to eternal life. Thus it was, that Abram rejoiced to see the day of the Son of God, that he saw it and was glad. He saw it, by the eye of faith resting upon that promise, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed:" and having thus beheld the first dawning of this Sun of righteousness which was afterwards to shine over the world with healing in its wings, he was filled with holy joy and rapture, in the faith of its glorious rising. This faith disclosed the day of life, to those who were dead under the sentence of the law, and their own alienation by the reigning power of a carnal mind. It disclosed the day of victory, when the triumphant Lamb of God would destroy the works of the devil, and bring in an everlasting righteousness; when peace should be made between the rebel and his insulted sovereign; when that justice and holiness, which continually demanded vengeance upon sinners, should plead for their reconciliation

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God; because mercy and truth should meet together in Christ, and the propitiation should be made for iniquity; when Immanuel should magnify the law and make it honourable; and the Father who sent Him on that errand, should be well pleased for his righteousness' sake, in doing and suffering for men, and especially, (as the bright centre of the whole system of mercy,) in dying for them the just for the unjust, that He might bring them unto God. Thus Abram saw the Son, and believed on Him, that he might have eternal life. Even as his natural eye beheld the firmament and stars of heaven, when God led him forth from his tent, to consider them, so did the eyes of his faith embrace the Messiah to come, and with Him the wonders of salvation, enlightening and glorifying that new heaven and new earth, of which He is to be the beauty and blessedness. That eye of faith looked to upon something of the depths of divine love, the counsels of redemption, before the fortunes of the world were laid; it then cast enraptured glance forward towards the glory of the invisible world, and the wonders of salvation that are within the veil. And look whither it would, Christ was in the prospect, Christ

all and in all. Abram's faith was simple, his joy was cordial, permanent, glorious, and unspeakable.

The person and works of God in Christ Jesus reconciling the world to Himself, were therefore the great objects of Abram's justifying faith. I do not mean to suggest, that the patriarch was not already a man justified before God; but that the instance of his faith which was thought proper to be selected by the Holy Spirit, as the distinguished model for believing unto righteousness, was that only, wherein immediate respect was had to the Messiah. Christians may believe in God, with reference to all ordinary concerns of life, and such faith may authorize the presumption of their righteousness in the eye of God. But this is not the faith whereby they are justified; which as I have already said, invariably rests on Christ, and is conversant with Him alone, as made unto the believing Church of God, "*Wisdom and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption.*"¹

(1) Abram's faith unto justification took the first step of that process whereby it reached

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30.

and relied on the Lord our Righteousness in a conviction of his own sinfulness, and need of mercy, whereby to be provided with another righteousness able to abide the inquisition of a holy God. He was aware of his own guilt, which deserved the wrath of the Most High, and of the imputation to himself of all the pollution original and actual, under which he lay. He acknowledged, not merely the demerit of such a condition, but its utter helplessness. His mouth was stopped. He had become guilty before God; and owned that there was no other way of deliverance, than that ordained by the wisdom of the Almighty—that the Lord should lay on his incarnate Son the iniquity of the transgressor; which might thus be borne by his surety, and in his stead. A sense of this lost and dreadful condition under the curse and condemnation of the Law is needfully the first exhibition of that faith which is unto salvation. It plumes the wing for the flight of a penitent to the mercy of God in Christ, there to be saved from the wrath to come. “*They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*”¹ They only

¹ Matt. ix. 12.

will flee to lay hold of the hope set before them, who see, by faith, the avenger of blood behind them. To them only, will the widely opened gates of the city of refuge in Abram's Saviour be dear; and they only will escape thither for their lives, as to their place of safety in the munitions of the Rock of ages.

Connected also with this consciousness and conviction of sin, this awful persuasion of being found wanting, when the soul weighs itself in the balances of the sanctuary, is an absolute renunciation of all means within the fallen creature's power to employ on his own behalf, whereby to attain a righteousness which shall be unto eternal life and salvation. This self-despair is an entirely needful ingredient of that faith which God will justly impute unto the believer for righteousness. "*Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains, which human pride would climb, and whence it would scale heaven, on the footing of reward as of debt.*"¹ *Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.*" Such a faith will make mention of his righteousness only; and will abhor to rest upon pretensions of obedience

¹ Jer. iii. 23.

and holiness ; knowing that the "*the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint : that from the head, even to the sole of the foot, there is no soundness in it ; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores :*"¹ and that thus to offer unto that God who chargeth even his angels with folly, and in whose sight not the heavens themselves are pure, would be as under the law, to offer the blind for sacrifice, and the lame, and the sick. The proud self-worshipper who should make an oblation of his own legal obedience for acceptance would be "as if he offered swine's blood ; and" he that burned this incense of self-complacency, "as if he blessed an idol." It would be as though our first parents, after the deep and awful guilt of their fall, should have proudly stood before God, and declared that He ought to be amply satisfied with their pains in sewing fig leaves together, to cover them, when He had reproached them for the sin that made them naked, and for the nakedness that had become their shame. They only can fully close with the gracious invitation of redeeming love, "*Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden ; and I will give you*

¹ Isa. i. 5.

rest,"¹ who have begun to learn that "the remembrance of sin is grievous unto them, the burden of it intolerable;" and that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified. They only will desire to "*be found in Christ, not having their own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is by the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is of God by faith.*"² To such a renunciation the Redeemer is absolutely needful: otherwise the soul would sink into despair, instead of exercising faith. Such a renunciation therefore, finds at once the grace and mercy of Jehovah a ready resting place and refuge; and there does it repose in the Son of God, as the Ark upon Mount Ararat, when the time of Noah's deliverance was at hand.

(2) Faith unto justification is *the heart's approbation of that method of peace and life which God hath provided for a fallen world in the glorious gospel of his grace.* It beholds there, a representation of his righteousness more bright than could have been reflected from any other mirror—a view of his hatred of sin more dark and dreadful than could have been communicated, save only at the cross of Christ—a

¹ Matt. xi. 28.

² Phil. iii. 9.

manifestation of his love, in giving his only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life, more beautiful than all the world of providential goodness could ever have embodied to the eye of man. It discovers a glory redounding to Him in the sum and substance, the Alpha and Omega of salvation, God's Son in man's nature, which magnifies his attributes, and secures Him a revenue of honour from redeemed creatures, which could not accrue to Him from the penal condemnation of every sinner that hath been born, or that shall yet live upon the earth, were he condemned to everlasting burnings. For if the honour of a king be the love of his subjects, then, the glory of God the universal Sovereign must be more highly advanced by the reverence of a world submitted to his sway, and joining the hallelujahs of his unfallen angels, than by the despairing curses, by the gnashing of teeth in vain and invincible anguish of a world of sinners, whose hearts would be bound up in rebellion, because they were sentenced to torment beyond the reach of hope.

(3) Faith has its exercise on *the Person of our adorable Saviour*. It sees that glory which

He had with the Father before the world was. It adores Him lying in that Father's bosom, making and preserving the world, the object of God's infinite complacency and delight, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and the one centre of worship, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, to all the powers and hierarchies of heaven. To this mysterious elevation indeed, must faith climb, before it can find a footing for peace: for if the Incarnate Word were merely the Son of Mary, merely of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting, and that flesh not the honoured tabernacle of God Himself, then the Agent and Surety of man's salvation, instead of being able to fulfil his office, and bear the load for which He had engaged, would have sunk beneath it: and the Mediator and the hopes of a ruined world would have been alike crushed by its weight. He would have vainly become the son of man, if He had not been from all eternity the Son of God. He would have been vainly our fellow, if he had not been the Fellow of the Lord of hosts.

Faith too sees the power of the Holy Ghost overshadowing the virgin, and forming that human body within her, in which Deity conde-

scended to dwell. Faith sees that Holy Thing which was born of her, not taking the nature of angels, but taking on Him the nature of Abraham, assuming that body which the Father had prepared for Him; so that therein He might be the fitting Days-Man to lay his hand alike upon the parties between whom He mediated; the hand of his divinity upon the Judge, and the hand of his humanity upon the criminal: making God and the sinner meet together, reconciled once and for ever in Himself.

Faith sees that great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, Jesus who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet taking upon Him the form of a servant, and being made in fashion as a man, and for a little time lower than the angels, humbling Himself unto death, even the death of the cross, that He might exalt sinners to an elevation of glory with Himself, which "*eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.*"¹ And most assuredly one who has been taught to ask, *What must I do to be saved?*" can never effectually apply to Christ for the great deliverance, except on his

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

mysterious unity of persons. For had He been a mere man, He might well have fallen, as Adam fell : and where then would have been the hope that He should have delivered us from Adam's curse ? Had He been only God, He could have performed no obedience to the law ; for He would have been, not its subject, but its sovereign. Such a view of the Almighty Justifier of the ungodly had Abram at this period. Therefore had he the power of his Saviour's death in the mortification of his own unbelief, before the Son of God felt the pangs of death upon the cross. Therefore did he rise to a new life by the resurrection of his Lord, before Christ laid his head in the grave. And therefore doth every believer, who looks for mercy at his Redeemer's hand regard Him, as the true fire in the bush at Horeb, God in human nature, not to consume, but to deliver ; not to condemn, but to save the world.

(4.) *Faith rests upon the all-sufficient work and offices of Jesus Christ for justification.* It sees Him magnifying the law, and making it honourable by the preciousness and perfection of a sinless obedience, an obedience which indwelling Deity alone could enable its human tabernacle and instrument of holiness to effect.

It witnesses the Mediator of the Covenant, blotting out the handwriting that was against transgressors; nailing it to his cross, removing the defilement and the guilt in his own blood, betrothing our lost nature to Himself—and enabling the least and lowest believer in the Church to say unto his soul, “*Thy Maker is thine Husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name.*”¹ Faith discovers in Him, that exhaustless storehouse of righteousness by his undeviating holiness, from which each believer may take the wedding garment of an absolute justification. It sees Him putting the beauty of his own perfection upon the soul, and presenting it to Himself and to his Father, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but comely in his comeliness, wherewith He enrobes it.

Here however, faith especially regards the PRIESTLY office of our Lord, in cleaving to Him as the Righteousness of all who believe, to the saving of the soul. Were his prophetic or kingly office more especially and exclusively concerned, as the objects of our belief, much less of Him, and much more of ourselves would probably be looked up to, in such a belief: for

¹ Isa. liv. 5.

its essence would be obedience to Him as a Teacher, and submission to Him as a Sovereign, which our fallen nature's pride would construe into merit before God. But man, condemned of God for the guilt of sin, and utterly devoid of all means of providing a righteousness of his own, must contemplate the sacerdotal office of our Lord, as setting forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood. For *Sanctification* we must look especially to the *King* and the *Prophet* : but in the sense of sin, of its cause and defilement, we must contemplate the *High Priest*, Christ and Him crucified, as Israel looked to the brazen serpent in the wilderness." " *By his knowledge,*" that is by faith in Him, " *shall my righteous servant justify many ; for He shall bear their iniquities.*"¹

The Redeemer was thus proposed to the acceptance of fallen man, as the great object of the first promise made in paradise. He was thus proposed to Abel in the blood of his sacrifice ; to the patriarchs, and especially to Abram, when he built the altar in Canaan ; to the Jews, in all the blood of bulls and of goats, shed according to the institutions of the law. And

¹ Isa. liii. 11.

as the cross sums up, and includes within itself all the other acts and offices of our Redeemer, faith comes to it, as to "*the fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness.*"¹ As a Prophet and a King, Christ answered neither the precept, nor the penalty of the Law: as a Priest He fulfilled the one, and amply paid the other with his own atoning sacrifice. And therefore in the sacerdotal office did the Father eternally instate and confirm Him, for the unspeakably great consolation of all who come unto God by Him, saying, "*Thou art a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.*"²

When Joseph's brethren stood before him, greatly needing his help, he refused to see their face, except they brought their brother Benjamin with them into his presence. Faith also, as exhibited towards God, is only acceptable, only admitted, if it present the appointed Saviour unto Him. He that thus believeth on the Son, and pleads Him, his person, perfections, undertaking, and accomplishment of mercy, in obedience unto death, hath life; but he that believeth not the Son of God hath not

¹ Zech. xiii. 1.

² Psalm cx. 4.

life; but the wrath of God abideth on him : and the warning comes from the lips of Him, who must enlighten man's heart by his teaching, as well as cleanse it by his sacrifice, in order to salvation.

The sense, in which Abram's faith was counted to him by the Lord for righteousness, and the doctrine of imputation itself, as stated by St. Paul, must be the subject of another discourse. I only add, that as without faith it is impossible to please God ; as without faith no man can come unto the Father ; as faith is the only key to unlock the treasure-house of salvation ; they who have it not, are without the pale of acceptance, though blessed be God, not yet without the reach of mercy. "*If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.*"¹ "*Lord, we would believe ; help Thou our unbelief.*"²

¹ John viii. 24.

² Mark ix. 24.

SERMON XIX.

JUSTIFYING FAITH IN ITS BLESSING.

GENESIS XV. 6.

HE BELIEVED IN THE LORD, AND HE COUNTED IT TO HIM
FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

IN studying the lives of eminent men, we enter even into the minute circumstances of their histories with attention: because the least particular concerning them may afford some instruction: but we reserve our main interest for those parts and passages of their conduct or fortunes, which were most important, and from which therefore the most profitable lessons may be derived. According to this rule, while every part of the life of Abram demands attention, there are scenes in it, brought before our eyes by the Holy Ghost, which demand our especial regard. Such in an eminent degree are all those, where he is exhibited, not merely as a

Saint, who adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, but as a representative of the Church of God, and of every member within its pale, to whom, in Him, the exceeding great and precious promises of salvation, are so plainly made, and the unchangeable truth of Jehovah, so deeply pledged for their fulfilment. In his person, the momentous doctrine of justification by the righteousness of a Mediator was fully and clearly preached to the Church : and by him, regarded as that Church's earthly head, appropriated through faith. *“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen, through faith, preached before the gospel unto him, saying, “In thee shall all nations be blessed.” “So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.”*¹

In the last discourse an endeavour was made to exhibit the especial object of Abram's faith, including his sense of mercy needed to him, as a transgressor of the divine law, and utterly hopeless of favour with God, except on the ground of mercy. Abram was shewn, as embracing with the glad and grateful claspings of his heart, that method of salvation which

¹ Gal. iii. 8, 9.

darkly shadowed forth the gospel. His faith was described, as exercising itself upon the mysterious Person, and amazing work of Immanuel,—*The Lord our Righteousness*. It remains now that I should consider the rich heritage and legacy bequeathed by him, as God's appointed earthly instrument of its conveyance, to the Church in

II. THE BLESSING WHEREWITH HIS FAITH WAS ATTENDED.

"He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to Him for righteousness."

As the doctrine contained in this little sentence is the light and hope of every man, whom the Holy Spirit hath taught to regard himself as a heinous offender against the law, majesty, holiness of the Most High, and yet as a transgressor under a covenant of mercy,—as it leads the heart by the sure, the simple, and the living way, to "*that only name under heaven, given to men, whereby they may be saved,*"¹ I shall endeavour to state the truth concerning it as plainly as possible. And if I shall be humbly instrumental to direct one individual to this Almighty Corner-Stone of salvation, may the

¹ Acts v. 12.

Holy Spirit place that seeker upon it for life and glory everlasting ! I inquire then,

(1) WHAT IS MEANT BY JUSTIFICATION, OR BEING ACCOUNTED RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD ?

'It is a legal term, borrowed from the forms and courts of human judicature, applied to spiritual realities, and to the procedures of the Almighty and holy Judge, regarding the condition wherein every man naturally stands before the bar of divine justice, there to take that awful trial ; upon which infinite and everlasting consequences of woe or blessedness must depend. Spiritual and mighty accusers stand by the criminal, to promote the dreadful charge against him. The broken law puts in its righteous plea. Conscience also bears its loud witness, and convicts the offender ; who can no more successfully evade the charge, than he can pluck the Judge from his throne. Satan likewise, the accuser of the brethren, stands at his right hand, to resist him. The charge is made good, and laid before the Judge in order that sentence may pass against the offender. But then mercy brings forward its full and triumphant plea in the gospel of unsearchable grace, and the suretyship of Christ. Then the blood of Christ is the ransom paid for deliver-

ance—then the full and inestimable Atonement made by God in human nature is brought before the august tribunal of the Judge—then the everlasting righteousness of Him who in man's stead, and as man's representative, fulfilled every requirement of the law, both the mightiest and the most minute, takes the sinner's part. To this refuge he hastens in his soul's deep earnestness, to be justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. To make the plea against judgment, and the mighty argument for acquittal incontrovertible, the penitent that visited in the sovereignty of mercy hath an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, who offers the all-sufficient propitiation for sin. Then follows the welcome sentence of absolution by the ransom, and the righteousness of the Mediator; and with it, acceptance with the Most High, and a portion in the inconceivable and everlasting blessings of his paternal love.

There is a difference between the pardon of sin, and justification before God; and they must not be confounded together. Remission of sins is an act of divine grace; but the righteousness of a believer, arising out of the satis-

Faction made by God in human nature on his behalf, and in his stead, is an act of justice on the part of the Almighty, due to the unsinning fulfilment of the Law by the perfect Mediator between Him and man. Pardon dismisses the charge of treason against the rebel: Justification invests him with a title to the Sovereign's love, according to the law of that Sovereign's appointment, and to an inheritance in his kingdom and its glory. When Joshua the High Priest in Zechariah's vision,¹ had the filthy garments wherein he stood before the angel removed, the act was a fitting and most vivid emblem of the removal of the guilt of sin, with the tremendous consequences awaiting its charge against the transgressor. But as this removal was only half the work of mercy—as he was afterwards clothed with a change of raiment, typifying the righteousness and full satisfaction made by the Incarnate Son of God, we are taught the preciousness of that righteousness which is *unto* all them that believe in the offers of the gospel, and *upon* them in its appropriation, by the faith which is of the operation of God. In *pardon* the believer is freed

¹ Zech. ii. 4, 5.

from condemnation: in *justification* he has a covenant right to all the joys of that kingdom, of which his Saviour is the glorified Administrator.

Now the justification of Abram, and consequently the justification of any believer may by no possibility depend upon his obedience to the law. Abram's actions were surely works of righteousness performed in faith, and love to God, performed through the Almighty help of the Holy Ghost; and required of him, and of all, according to the covenant of mercy. Yet were they expressly excluded from his justification—even as are those of every man who yet “*created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that he should walk in.*”¹ “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, God hath saved us.*”² This argument the Apostle triumphantly upholds and makes good in the instance of Abraham. *If he were justified by works, he had whereof to glory; but not before God. But what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Now to him*

¹ Eph. ii. 10.

*that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness."*¹

Abram's faith was by the judgment of Jehovah counted, or imputed to him for righteousness. To impute sin to any one is to lay it to his charge, and to deal with him, or with his surety, (as the case may be,) according to the desert of sin. This judgment Shimei deprecated, when he cried unto David concerning his insult and rebellion, "*Let not my Lord impute iniquity unto me; neither do thou remember what thy servant did perversely: for thy servant doth know that I have sinned.*"² But the imputation wherewith we are concerned in this inestimable example of Abram, is of two kinds, entirely different from each other. It exhibits the Lamb of God taking upon Himself, according to the Father's purpose, and his own infinitely compassionate agreement, the sins of us all, which otherwise never could have been his own, because of his essential and spotless holiness: and giving in

¹ Rom. iv. 2—5.

² 2 Sam. xix. 19, 20.

their stead his own perfect obedience; so that if we believe, we are made the righteousness of God in Him. Thus Paul undertook the injuries and loss which Philemon might have suffered from his slave Onesimus. "*If he have wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, set that to mine account. I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it.*"¹ Thus Judah said unto Israel concerning Benjamin, "*Send the lad with me; I will be surety for him: of my hand shalt thou require him. If I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever.*"² Our own sin is most righteously imputed unto us, cleaves to us, with a power and closeness, from which, in our own might, there is no escape: but the righteousness of Christ belongs not to us, except as the decree of God hath made it over to them that believe. The sin of all is laid on Christ; as the iniquities of Israel on the head of the scape goat. But that ordinance of the law could impart no righteousness. What was negative in the type is graciously brought in positive appropriation before the Church, for the rich consolation of every member it contains,

¹ Philemon 18, 19.² Gen. xlii. 9.

of every lively stone in that temple which God will inhabit and glorify to all eternity. Our sin is imputed to the Mediator, that He might atone for it, destroy it, and remove it from the sight of the Judge for ever. The righteousness of Christ on the other hand is imputed to all believers, that it may abide with them, and everlastingly change their state and relation to God, not merely from condemnation to acquittal, but to adoption, and to all the blessings flowing from it, as the unfailing well-head of their supply. Man's sin, from which the spotless Lamb of God was essentially and absolutely free, was by divine appointment transferred to the Surety; as though He were guilty; in order that the righteousness vested in Him, of which man was utterly destitute, might be attributed to man, appealing by faith to his appointed Bondman; as though the real offender were blameless and innocent. He was made sin, as really, with reference to *substitution*, as if He had committed every iniquity, whereby God hath been dishonoured by men; and believers in Him are made righteous, as though they had never offended.

And never must it be forgotten, for the peace and joy of true Christians, that this mutual

substitution comes in virtue of the Church's membership and union with its glorified Head. If there had been no union of our race with Adam, his sin could have no more been imputed to us, than if the offence had been committed by an angel; or than the dreadful guilt of the fallen angels can be laid to our charge. Even, so, unless we have union with Christ, what He hath done and suffered, and all the mightiness of its sum of merit can never rest upon us for favour and happiness, at the hand of God. "*If one died for all, then were all dead.*"¹ Why? Because every baptized believer, as a member of the Lord's body, of his flesh, and of his bones, has been therefore crucified with Him, and has risen with Him. It is thus, as though the same wrath which He endured, had been endured by every real Christian, as one with Him: and the full legal acquittance given to Him by the Father, had been by the self-same act communicated to those who are one with Him by faith. And therefore, as the highest distinction arising out of this oneness, doth the Apostle address his brethren of Corinth, "*Of him are ye in Christ Jesus; who of God is made*

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14.

*unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."*¹ "O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and goodness of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"²

(II.) A few words must now suffice to remark, IN WHAT MANNER ABRAM'S FAITH WAS COUNTED, OR IMPUTED UNTO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Faith itself could not, assuredly be, either wholly or partially, the actual cause of justification. *Not wholly*; for then the amazing work of redeeming love, in obedience and sacrifice would have been altogether superseded. *Not partially*; for then our glorious Immanuel, with all his unsinning legal righteousness, would have been a mere supplement, to compensate for some deficiency in creature duties. Faith, on either supposition, must have been regarded as a work wrought by man for God; rather than as a grace implanted in man by the Almighty hand of the Spirit. It would have been an offering to God, instead of a portion of that sanctification which God promises in his gospel,

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30.

² Rom. xi. 33.

and gives in his Son.¹ Faith is neither the obedience nor the blood of Christ: and therefore in strictness of language can neither give pardon, nor be imputed for righteousness, which that blood and that obedience can alone convey, according to the provisions of the covenant of grace. The righteousness of God imputed unto us, is the righteousness of God by faith: and therefore faith itself and absolutely cannot be that righteousness. It is wholly excluded by the very doctrine of a gratuitous salvation, from being the efficient, or the moving, or the meritorious cause of justification. It is itself imper-

¹ "This faith, this believing, was imputed unto Abraham for righteousness. Not that his faith was, by a gracious estimation, accounted by God in the room of perfect obedience, which the covenant of works required: but that by his faith he laid hold on, and spiritually united or appropriated to himself the promised seed; by virtue of which union all the righteousness of that seed was reputed to be his righteousness. Thus in the book of God's account his blessings are written on one page, as so many talents bestowed upon men; and the sins of men, not rendering to Him the thanks due for his benefits are so many debts: and lastly, the condemnatory sentence, by which they are declared guilty of eternal death. But as man's righteousness could not stand on the other page, the satisfaction and merits of Christ for believers are inscribed; and likewise their faith, as the gratuitous gift of God, and that by which they are united to Christ, and become partakers of all his righteousness. Thus faith is imputed for righteousness."—Witsius' *Economy of the Covenants*. Vol. ii. p. 158.

fect, intimately and inseparably defiled by sin; and therefore utterly unable to make atonement, or provide a righteousness. It needs itself to be washed in the pure laver of the Redeemer's Atonement; how then can it be the substitute of that Atonement? It needs the obedience of the Son of Man to make it perfect; how then can it come before God, in the stead of that holiness? If Abram's mere faith might have been counted to him for righteousness, or if a like belief in any of his spiritual posterity might be so imputed, then why not any other good deeds of man's performance? The spiritual view enjoyed by the patriarch, so long before his Saviour's incarnation, beheld Him as the unsinching and perfect righteousness of his church. *"He was fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able to perform: and therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now, adds the Holy Ghost, it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead."*¹ What shall be imputed? Surely not the faith of

¹ Rom. iv. 21—24.

Abram, which was so far from the possibility of justifying the Church of God that it could not deliver himself, nor make him righteous. The righteousness of Christ then, is to be imputed to us, if we so believe: and thus only can we stand before God in peace, and blameless. Therefore did the Apostle, in the abundance of heavenly wisdom, taught him by the Holy Ghost, desire to be found in his Lord—in happy mystical union with Him; “*not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but that which was through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which was of God by faith.*”¹

Here, however, it will be asked—and the question must needs be answered, ‘In what manner is the faith of every believer, like that of Abram, counted to him by God for righteousness?’

When the sacrifice was offered under the law, the sinner’s consent to the way of appointed mercy was testified by laying his hand upon the victim’s head; intimating his union with it, and therefore his desire and expectation of that blessing of pardon and acceptance, which the offering was typically intended to provide,

¹ Phil. iii. 9.

Even so it is, in the matter of that great oblation, wherein “*God hath made Him to be sin who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*”¹ The believer coming to the all-prevailing sin-offering, renounces himself, embraces the Saviour, in his obedience and death, as the glorious choice of the Father for his salvation, in whom he, as well as that Father is well pleased: and thus the Redeemer and the sinner are one, for the otherwise lost creature’s peace, justification, and adoption into the family of God. Then follows the gracious interchange, whereof I have already spoken—the righteousness of God to the believer; and his sins to his substitute and surety in the covenant. Faith is the eye and hand of the soul, wherewith it sees, and reaches forth unto, and embraces the great Mediator—grasps Him as a sacrifice for guilt, and leans on Him for that imputed righteousness, which God the Father will surely accept, because it is his own gracious appointment. Faith cleaves to the way of escape provided; and thus instates him, in whose heart it has been wrought, in all the merit of the inestimably precious bondsman

¹ 2 Cor. v. 21.

who hath undertaken to satisfy infinite holiness, and save the infinitely guilty and sinful objects of that otherwise consuming justice. To be justified therefore by faith, is exactly to be justified by the obedience of Christ. It is not the grace wherein we stand; but that whereby we have access to it. It is the band of the soul's union to the Mediator: and that union thus effected, the streams and channels are opened, whereby all the blessings of redemption flow into, and refresh the soul. And thus, "*as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*"¹ "*Blessed are the people, that know the joyful sound of this salvation, they shall walk in the light of God's countenance; in their Saviour's name shall they rejoice all the day, and in his righteousness shall they be exalted.*"² They shall be raised above the covenant of works, which worketh death; above all the accusations of Satan, of sin, of conscience, of the Law: for who shall lay any thing to their charge—it is God that justifieth? O that our hearts may respond to the gospel call made to them, that we may flee

¹ Rom. v. 19.² Psalm lxxxix. 15, 16.

to this Almighty and unfading hope : that as in the Lord Jesus alone we can be justified, so in Him alone we may glory !

Time compels me to omit many of the minor parts of this great argument, especially the Apostle's assurance, that justification by faith embraces the uncircumcision, as well as the circumcision, the Jew as well as the Gentile. But a spiritual perception will easily make the reference from the words of St. Paul. (Rom. iv. 9—16.) May the teaching of the Eternal Spirit enkindle this gracious power of understanding in all our hearts, and make us all evermore to rejoice in its holy comfort !

I observe then, that justification by faith, the warp of that precious robe of mercy which is woven in the gospel loom, provides in an especial manner for two great ends, very near to the heart of God, who is jealous as well as merciful.

(I.) *It provides in the most ample mode and degree for the advancement of his own honour ; the high and glorious end for which, we and all things are and were created.* Are the riches of his mercy to be magnified ? Is the treasure of divine love to be opened in the gospel, and exhibited to the admiration of redeemed men ?

God doth it most effectually, in making a race of restored transgressors, once far alienated from Him, and hating Him for his very perfections, accepted in the Beloved, to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Must the fountains of his wisdom be opened, and their clearness, not less than their unfathomable depths disclosed? Jesus is the water of life : and salvation through faith in his name is the amazing method, whereby "*unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.*"¹ Human intellect, angelic imagination must have been for ever unable to exhibit Jehovah thus to the eyes of all in heaven, and all on earth : but in Him do we hear the full harmony of that angelic song, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.*"² And if a scheme of salvation so transcendently wise and beautiful, be eminently fitted to exalt the wisdom and grace of God the Father, shall it not magnify equally in the esteem of all who have learned its price and worth, the glory of Him by whom it was effected in righteousness of obedience, abso-

¹ Eph. iii. 10.

² Luke ii. 14.

lately perfect, and in the sufferance of a penalty for the world's sin, infinitely intense? All the glory of saving men from endless guilt and misery, and of raising them to an equally enduring state of blessedness, centres in the incarnate Son of God, for that is his alone and unaided work. And thus did He on earth, and does now in heaven present them to the Father as the travail of his soul, saying, "*All mine are thine, and all thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.*" I call upon you therefore, who have experienced this love of Jesus—upon you, who are washed, sanctified, and justified in his name and by the Spirit of our God, to lift up the thankful melody of your hearts in praise, "*to Him who hath loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood, and hath made you kings and priests unto God and his Father,*"¹ a royalty never to be attained; a priesthood never to be abolished.

II. Justification by faith eminently provides for that end, without which all would be in vain,—*The holiness of those who believe to the salvation of the soul.*² If we are made partakers of this imputed righteousness, which is the

¹ Rev. i. 5, 6.

² 1 Pet. i. 9.

Christian robe of acceptance, and diadem of glory, we shall be zealous after practical righteousness. If the king's daughter be clothed with raiment made of wrought gold, to be beautiful in her Bridegroom's eye, by his righteousness, she will be all glorious within, by the work of a gracious sanctification. We shall remember *who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*¹ There can be no personal righteousness, in the eye and estimation of God, before justification, for it is wholly the obedience of faith. But if any man has put on the Lord Jesus Christ, he will "*make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil it in the lusts thereof.*"² It is utterly impossible that justifying faith should be unattended with love. From the sides of the true gospel altar of a suffering Redeemer, must flow that river of the water of life, which heals the dead sea of the soul's corruption, whereinto it flows. We love Him because He first loved us: and love is the fulfilling of the law. Embracing salvation, in the person and work of the adorable Surety of sinners, the

¹ Titus ii. 14.² Rom. viii. 14.

Christian hath those exceeding great and precious promises, of which that Surety is also the substance and beauty, and worth ; and they are given to him, in order that he may be made partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust. The very acceptance of Christ in his priestly office, making Atonement for sin, and fulfilling the law of God by his perfect obedience unto death, secures holiness of heart and life in his true disciples. The faith that justifies the sinner, destroys sin ; and the heart is purified unto holiness. Here is the great glory of the gospel of our redemption ; and here the great test, whether we are believers or infidels. If the latter, then we are living according to the course of this world ; and if the former, then have we begun "*to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, in holiness through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"¹

¹ Rom. vi. 11.

SERMON XX.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM.

GENESIS XV. 17, 18.

IT CAME TO PASS, THAT, WHEN THE SUN WENT DOWN, AND IT WAS DARK, BEHOLD A SMOKING FURNACE, AND A BURNING LAMP, THAT PASSED BETWEEN THOSE PIECES. IN THE SAME DAY, THE LORD MADE A COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM.

It is well known in cases of bodily indisposition, that a remedy long continued, frequently loses much of its effect; and must be remitted for a time, or applied in larger quantities, or mingled with some other medicine which may increase its energy. Something similar to this state of things may be observed in the experience of others, who yet, like the father of the faithful, live, not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. The promise of a country, a posterity, and a Saviour, were repeatedly given to him. He embraced it with all his heart: but his trust

had a natural tendency to grow feeble : and as years passed on, with nothing more than reiterated declarations, though proceeding from the God of truth, his heart seemed at length to loosen its hold of simple dependence, and to be almost falling into doubt, and into the grave of comfort which doubt opens to the mind. In this chapter, although upon a new assurance, simply and exclusively directing his faith to the future incarnation of the Word, *he believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness :*"¹ yet when Jehovah declares the purpose of bringing him out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give him the land of Canaan, he asks a sign from heaven, whereupon his confidence may lean, as something, so to speak, palpable for its support. "*He said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it ?*"² A gracious answer, exhibiting the infinite condescension of the Most High, is immediately vouchsafed. He is commanded to make a sacrifice, and God enters into, and establishes a covenant with him, and with his seed for ever.

In this memorable transaction we possess, as it were the rudiments and sketch of that

¹ Gen. xv. 6.

² Gen. xv. 8.

dispensation of sovereign mercy, wherein hath pleased God to deal with men, as sinners, and to place before them a salvation, claiming to be received with adoring gratitude; a salvation which it will be their eternal ruin and misery to despise and refuse. I propose therefore to examine

I. THE CONTRACTING PARTIES IN THE COVENANT.

II. THE MANNER OF MAKING IT.

III. THE SUBJECTS WHICH IT INVOLVES.

I. A covenant is an agreement between persons or parties, for some common end, which may be pleasing or advantageous to both; involving conditions voluntarily assented to by them, and to which they bind themselves by solemn obligations. 'When we speak however, of a covenant of God with men, an important difference must be observed. There is no natural equality between the parties, nor independence of one upon the other; and therefore no mutual adjustment of terms may take place, between them. God wills; and men must obey. But his revealed mind and purpose is called a covenant; because, as respects God, He has no rule of action but his own will, yet is pleased hereby to bind Him-

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his dealings with men, to the observance of the same terms. *As respects men*, they are to fulfil the conditions prescribed in the covenant, under pain of forfeiting its offered blessings, and incurring its attendant penalties.¹ The covenant originally made with Adam, and by the name of the covenant of works, was between two parties, Jehovah and his creature, in a state of entire harmony with each other: and originally had no mediator between them. Adam undertook to serve God in absolute obedience; unto which he was enabled, being created in his Maker's perfect image; and blessings were promised to his obedience. That covenant, *"Do this and live,"*² still holds good for those who choose, in the sad delusion of the flesh, to stand before God on the ground of their own merit: but who,—as man's sinfulness hath made a sinless obedience—the obedience which a perfectly holy God can accept, impossible, seal their own condemnation, and so abide under the sentence of the righteous Judge for their violation of the covenant.

Here the parties are at strife with each

See on the Better Covenant. p. 5. See also Witsius, Vol. 1. p. 25.
² Luke x. 28.

other, and the covenant is to be made, a mediator must be employed, who can undertake the common cause, so as to secure the interest of each, and to bring them into union for the advantage or happiness of both. Such was the covenant made between God and his creatures, lost and ruined by sin, through that great Day's man of his own providing—the "*one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*"¹ He was the Mediator of the New and better Covenant. *He was the Seed of the woman promised in paradise to bruise the serpent's head*²—the Seed of Abraham engaged to be the blessing of all the families of the earth. He was that glorious Mediator, of whom Moses was the type, when Israel stood around the base of Sinai, forbidden by God to touch its flaming terrors: and themselves, overwhelmed with dread, beseeching Moses to go and hear the word of the Lord on their behalf,—while God on the other hand, had allowed and appointed him to stand between Himself and his people, lest they died. By this common Mediator has that everlasting covenant of grace, ordered in all things and

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 5.² Gen. iii. 15.

sure, been made between God and man, of which the covenant entered into with Abram gives the significant and instructive outline. It must not be considered as a mere personal dealing between Jehovah, and the father of the faithful. Abram stands not upon the ground of abstract reciprocity with God, nor makes an immediate agreement with Him to the exclusion of his posterity, in this transaction. He is rather in this momentous portion of his history, to be regarded in a *federal capacity*, and as representing his seed; as Adam was the federal head of his whole race—the representative father of all the families of the earth, who fell under the sentence of eternal death, by his most guilty transgression. In this point of view therefore, Abram stands before the Church as an eminent type of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Abraham, the spiritual and everlasting Father of that posterity, which should be born to Him, as the travail of his soul, like dew-drops from the womb of the morning. The Word of the Lord who appeared unto Abram in this mysterious visit, was the glorious Mediator between God and the patriarch, thus figuratively appearing as a party in this most beautiful exhibition of God's unsearchable grace to sinners.

The contracting parties are, on the side of heaven, God; whether personally considered as the Father, the first Person in the glorious Trinity, or God essentially considered in his Trinity of persons; (for divines are not agreed between these opinions :) and Abram in his representative character on the other,—the type, as I said, of Christ, in his mystical body. In the first covenant, God contracted with man, as a friend,—but now as an enemy: all being gone aside, all together become filthy, none doing good, no not one: yet still as an enemy admitted to an entire amnesty and reconciliation. This agreement therefore is for peace unto those who had been, and are, impiously and hopelessly at war with heaven. It is struck between a God of justice, who will magnify his Law and make it honourable, unto whom it was absolutely and for ever impossible to shew mercy to sinners, in prejudice of his assented holiness,—and those by whom that justice had been outraged, as represented in Jesus Christ. A guilty world must have died without a hope of salvation, unless a sufficient surety could be provided, who should undertake, upon God's own terms, which must be those of infinite and spotless holiness, to save them,

as they lay crushed beneath the broken law of God, and the covenant of works, made with their yet unfallen parent.

Who then undertakes the cause of men, thus ruined and undone? Even the eternal Son of God—even He who could alone present them perfect in Himself, and with Himself to the Father, and say, “*Behold I, and the children whom the Lord hath given me.*”¹ As the first Adam had an office of *representation* in the covenant of works, so hath the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, in the covenant of grace and mercy. The promises were made to Him as the Head and Surety of all future believers. “*He saith not, And to seeds as of many; but as of one; and unto thy seed, which is Christ.*”² Even so the promise, not of an earthly Canaan, as in the first instance to Abram, was made to the adorable Mediator between God and sinners, but of a heavenly inheritance—even that eternal life which God who cannot lie, promised before the world began, and promised therefore to his Son, before our guilty race which He had undertaken to save was called into being. Of this Covenant, He is

¹ Isaiah viii. 18.

² Gal. iii. 16.

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man's behalf the all-sufficient, the Almighty
rety—no other peace-maker having been ap-
ointed in the counsels of everlasting wisdom—
none else fitted for the momentous office—none
else designed, or ever intended to be accepted
or its discharge—none else able to effect the
reconciliation absolutely required. And why?
Because none else is endowed with power to
interpose a defence between us, and the wrath
of God against us, by taking that burden upon
himself, and bearing it away for ever, amidst
the agonies of the cross: because none else
could be the Priest, to offer, the worthy Victim
for an oblation, or the acceptable Intercessor
to plead the completeness of the sacrifice, and
the consequent satisfaction of God, before the
throne of appeased and glorified justice and
holiness in heaven.

Every age and country of the world
teemed with wonders, natural, intellectual,
moral. Arts, sciences, and inventions, have
been enlarged and multiplied; and many of them
vastly important to the present comfort and
advantage of man. The bounds of learning
have been extended, until they now embrace a circle
of knowledge that sometimes commands a blind
unthinking wonder. But never in the history

heaven or earth was a page, so stupendously momentous to immortal creatures revealed to our eyes, as that which the Most High God has vouchsafed to publish, by bringing before us in his own divine word the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. Are we permitting ourselves to disregard it? Are we allowing God in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world to Himself, to solicit our attention and our hearts in vain, while our minds are occupied by the perishing trifles, from which death will soon separate us for ever? Then are we like children delighting in the toy which will be lost, or broken, or despised, before the evening come; instead of being like men, whose faculties are enlarged to know their true interest, and their hearts on fire to obtain it. If we will not take our portion in this covenant, we must have it in another, even the tremendous condemnation of the covenant of works. “*He that believeth not is condemned already,*”¹—condemned by that law which he cannot keep, and by that glorious gospel of love which he will not accept.

II. Some facts are recorded in THE MANNER

¹ John iii. 18.

OF MAKING THIS COVENANT that require our attention.

God said to Abram, "*Take me a heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds he divided not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcase, Abram drove them away.*"¹ It is remarkable that every one of these materials for sacrifice was such as God commanded in the law made four hundred and thirty years after this eventful period. As therefore the *blood of bulls and of goats* was shed under the typical dispensation of the law, "*to sanctify by its sprinkling to the purifying of the flesh,*" so did this slain and sacrificed oblation shadow forth the *blood of Him who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, that He might purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God.*"² These animals, which had in all probability bled on the patriarchal altars from the beginning, were types of the offering of the

¹ Gen. xv. 9—11.

² Heb. ix. 13, 14.

body of Jesus Christ once for all—a link in the long chain of testimonies, from Abel's altar, to that whereupon the Lamb of God was slain, “that *without the shedding of blood there is no remission.*”¹

Indeed the correspondence continually appearing between the sacred rites of the patriarchal religion, and the ceremonies enjoined under the legal dispensation of Sinai, affords us the strongest presumption, that a revealed directory must have existed for the regulation of divine worship, from the beginning of the world. How else shall we avoid the supposition, that the patriarchs, approaching God with sacrificial blood, did not commit the transgression of using that “will worship” which He absolutely condemns? In fact, the same word is used to signify both the covenant itself, and the sacrifice wherewith it was ratified: in testimony, as I have already observed, that sin and sinfulness, being of necessity supposed on the part of man, the death of a substitute was necessary to remove the offence from man, and reconcile him with God.² To that blood, not only shed on our behalf on the cross, but

¹ Heb. ix. 22.

² Exod. xxiv. 8. Psalm l. 5. Isaiah xlii. 6. xlix. 8. Zech. ix. 11.

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asked upon our souls by faith, must we
deal from the stern and unyielding decisions
the law, if we would have peace with heaven,
and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. No
one might ever venture to come into Jehovah's
presence without that new and living way into
the holiest, even by the blood of Jesus, for had
he been *willing* so to do, the law would have
thrust him back, even to death. But now the
great sacrifice, thus shadowed forth, pleading
his unsearchably precious oblation, is able to
leave to the uttermost all them that come unto
God by Him; and his faithfulness is as un-
bounded as his ability.¹ This remarkable cere-
mony of dividing victims, previously slain in
sacrifice, and making the stipulating parties part
between the different portions of the bodies
was commonly practised in the earlier ages
of the world, as profane histories inform us.
It doubtless had its origin in that perverted view
of divine truth, which men took, when they
traded it through the dark medium of superstitious
tradition. And we have a similar allusion re-
corded by Jeremiah, to a circumstance not mentioned
in any of the historical books of the Old Testament.

¹ Biddulph's Theology of the Patriarchs, li. 178.

tament. "*I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant, which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life.*"¹ In all cases the parties appear to have passed between the divided portions; as though it were to acknowledge their desert of punishment if they broke the league thus solemnly established. Or rather, as contrasting the covenant with the dead sacrifice, to suppose him saying—*As I live it shall be thus.*²

But what was the case in this wonderful transaction? "*When the sun went down and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burn-*

¹ Jer. xxxiv. 18. 1 Sam. xi. 7

² By cutting the animals asunder, was denoted that in the same manner the perjured, and covenant breakers should be cut asunder by the vengeance of God. An ancient form of these execrations is extant in Livy. "The Roman people do not first break these conditions: but if they should avowedly, and through treachery break them, do thou, O Jupiter, on that day, thus strike the Roman people, as I now strike this hog: and be the stroke the heavier, as thy power is the greater." By the ceremony of confederates passing between the parts cut asunder, was signified, that being now united by the strictest ties of religion, and by a solemn oath, they formed but one body.

*ing lamp, (or a lamp of fire) that passed between these pieces."*¹ This solemn appearance was the common emblem of Jehovah's presence. "*He went before his people in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night,"*² not two, but one and indivisibly the same. "*Mount Sinai was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace."*³ Such an appearance was the Shekinah, which rested between the cherubim, over the mercy seat of the ark. This glorious symbol of the divine presence passed between the divisions of Abram's sacrifice, to ratify the solemn covenant. Jehovah—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, thus represented, bound Himself by a new obligation to fulfil all his promises; and most especially those which secured the coming and office of Jesus Christ for the world's salvation.

The natural darkness, and the horror of great darkness which in his deep sleep fell upon the friend of God, signified, not merely the afflictions awaiting his posterity in Egypt, the house of their bondage: but in a spiritual and especial manner, the terrors of the wrath im-

¹ Gen. xv. 12.² Exod.

pending over every man who does not flee to Christ, and the brightness of that mercy which revelation has poured upon every opened eye, in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It exhibited that blackness of darkness, whereto the Law thrusts those who are under the covenant of works, and the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, as a reconciled Father, in the face of Jesus Christ.

Omitting the other particulars of this miraculous vision, as less immediately connected with my purpose of explaining the Abrahamic covenant, I notice

III. THE BLESSINGS WHICH THAT COVENANT INVOLVED, as they were afterwards more clearly developed to mankind in the types and prophecies of the Law, and fulfilled in the glorious Mediator of the new and better covenant, in his own blood.

Its most distinguishing, most inviting, and most precious feature, to those for whom it was devised, carried forward, and ratified once for all upon Calvary, is that of its *absolute freedom and graciousness*. It is a covenant of mercy, entirely unconditional to guilty, condemned, and helpless man. The covenant of grace, with respect to us, consists of the abso-

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promises of God, in which the Mediator himself—the life to be obtained by Him—the manner whereby we may be made partakers of it, and of the benefits which his death hath purchased—perseverance in that faith—in a word, the whole salvation, with all its requisites, are freely promised. This covenant was made, in order that men, dead in trespasses and sins, might be raised to spiritual life—to the communion with God which follows from such glorious being, and to the everlasting glory, wherein it is consummated. No effectual conditional covenant, could possibly be made, for life, with those who were yet dead, and to be revived through the work of its blessedness in the Redeemer upon them, applied by the Holy Spirit. They must have had life, before they could perform conditions which necessarily transferred powers of spiritual existence. The colours of the brightest rainbow are not more discernible to the eye, than the inscription which faith reads upon the covenant of redemption—mercy to man as a sinner—even “Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹ All that

¹ 1 Tim. i. 2.

this would be the misery and mockery of the poor, and guilty, and wretched, and impotent creatures, lying in the sepulchre, and under the grave-stone of their iniquities; whom yet it professed to save.

It will, however, be remembered, that what is thus brought before our eyes, as our only but all-sufficient hope (God grant, as our everlasting cause of rejoicing) in the light of a provision of purely free and unconditional mercy, irrespective of all desert on our part, is yet on the part of God and Christ, a covenant of conditions and works. Each covenant, the first and the second, that of works, and that of grace, has a condition; and that condition is the same in both—perfect obedience to the holy law of God. Where then, it may be asked, lies the vast difference? where, in fact, lies the difference at all? O the depths of the mind of God! It lies essentially and palpably here. In the covenant of works, the condition of perfect obedience was required to be performed by man himself. In the covenant of grace, the same condition is proposed, as to be (or, as already) performed by a Mediator.¹ In this substitu-

¹ See Witsius on the Covenant, quoted by Goode on the Better Covenant.

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f the person obeying the law, consists the
ty and glorious difference between the
ants—between the dispensation of death,
the dispensation of life; between that
ch pays the wages of sin to the transgressor
eternal death, and that wherein the gift of
ed is eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.
e paid man's debt of obedience, by his perfect
abmission to the moral law, and exemplifica-
ion of its duties, thereby bringing in an ever-
lasting righteousness. And He paid man's
debt of punishment, when He died as his sub-
stitute upon the hill of crucifixion. "We have
redemption through his blood, the forgiveness
sins, according to the riches of his grace."
And, clasping Him with the hand of faith,
have, or rather we are made, (which is a new
distinction still) the righteousness of God
Him.

In this covenant of absolute mercy, the
fits and blessings are such as flow from
wondrous union of offices which the Redeemer
undertook and fulfilled for us sinful men
for our salvation—as the Prophet, as the
King of his church. As a Priest, &c.

made the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. "*Hath entered, not by the blood of bulls and of goats, but by his own blood into the holy place; having obtained eternal redemption,*"¹—in the *means*, for all—and in the *actual right*, for all who believe: and therefore they who thus hang only on his cross, may draw nigh in full assurance of faith. For the sake of that glorious Priest, and of that inestimable Sacrifice which he offered, God hath said concerning all who come to Him, "*I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more.*"² Come thus to Him, and enjoy the mercies of this the fundamental office of the only Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Contemplate now the blessings arising from the Redeemer's *prophetical* office, as they belong to any member of his mystical body, through faith. He teaches not as the philosopher, the orator, the rhetorician teaches. He will not mock you by speaking of the innate beauty of virtue, and the bright constellation of excellences exhibited by the mind and heart

¹ Heb. ix. 12.

² Heb. viii. 12.

of natural man. He will testify of Himself; He will put into your hearts the word that maketh wise unto salvation, through faith in Him, by the arm of his Almighty power, even as when He called Matthew, and Omnipotence went with the command. When He cries, "Know the Lord," every one, into whose heart He sends that voice, shall know Him, even from the greatest to the least. He will instruct rightly concerning God, rightly concerning sin, and open to the view of man's admiring soul, the fulness of God's salvation in Himself.

Regard Him in his *kingly* office. He is engaged to set up his own government in his brethren; that they may love the Lord their God with all their soul, and all their strength: that they may fear the Lord, and keep his ordinances, and his statutes, and his commandments to do them. He will lay the sceptre of Almightyness upon their sinful affections, to subdue them: He will bestow upon them the abundance of spiritual peace. He will give them victory over tempters and temptations. He will pour out upon them the Holy Spirit, with all the sanctification, and all the comfort, which this inestimable subject of New Testament promise

was royally appointed by Him in the covenant to produce, wheresoever He enters the heart. He will gather the mind's affections around Himself; and reign in meek and gracious sovereignty over them all. He will unite every believer to Himself; and of all so gifted with this ineffably gracious oneness, it hath been already testified, on the part of Jehovah, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." *"I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."*¹ He will effectually turn them to the love and obedience of his holy commands; making the law of God their delight, according to his own gracious undertaking. *"This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after these days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts."*² In Him they are justified, in Him they are sanctified, in Him they walk before God in newness of life; in Him they persevere in holiness; and at length through God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity, after their final victory over death, the grave, and hell.

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 18.

² Heb. viii. 10.

The rich and varied blessings involved in the covenant mercy, are such as "*eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive,*"¹ save only in the Gospel, where this fountain of life is opened. The Holy Ghost hath stamped his own seal upon it, in every part of the Divine word. The Covenant of salvation by grace through faith,—God's own gift as a part of the salvation, runs, like a golden thread through all the pages of the Bible. The breach of the first covenant left us all burdened with a debt of poverty, misery, sin; with a burden of curses from the law's condemnation, which every effort of our own to remove—even a man's natural and unconverted heart had wished to remove, it would have been only continually increasing, by increasing our sum of transgression. But He is freely given to our necessities, as made of God unto all who accept Him, "*wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*"²

There is no help, no justification, nothing but wrath, and woe, and death, if we remain under the covenant of works. Who the

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

² 1 Cor. ii. 90.

among you is in this condemnation? Have you considered what you will do, if God thus find you at the last? Can you meet death, judgment, eternity, without Christ? It may be you have long rejected Him, and yet He offers Himself to you still: and though the sins of this denial "*have been as scarlet, yet shall they be white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*"¹ Will your covenant with the law, which, alas, is only a covenant for eternal woe, be a better possession than one made by God in Christ, to supply all your spiritual need, and all your temporal wants also, as may be best for the family of God? No: the devil himself—the author and father of lies, although he may try thus to persuade you, believes not his own suggestion. O cast off his allurements: close your ears against him: and let me adjure you, by the authority of God, by the commands of the Holy Ghost, by the invitations of Jesus Christ, and by the depths of his mercy, to take Him by faith, and with Him all the blessings of Abram's faith, and Abram's covenant of life.

¹ Isaiah i. 38.

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THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM.

Ἐκαστον τῶν εἰρημέτων μετὰ δαριβείας διερευνησόμεθα ἵνα
ἴδωμεν τῆς γνώμης τοῦ πατριάρχου τὸ φιλόθεον Ἰσχύει
πῶς ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐκ προσμίων ἐγυμνάζεν ὁ δίκαιος τὰ μὴ φαι-
νομένα τῶν φαινομένων προτιμᾷ, καὶ τὰ μελλούσα τῶν ἐν
χερσὶν ὄντων.—Chrysost. Homil. XXXI. in Cap. 12. Genes.

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

ILLUSTRATED

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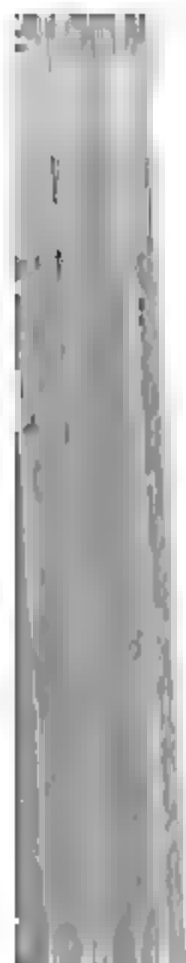
LIFE OF ABRAHAM :

A SERIES OF DISCOURSES
PREACHED IN ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, EVERTON ;

BY
THE REV. R. P. BUDDICOM, M.A. F.A.S.
MINISTER OF THAT CHURCH, AND LATE FELLOW
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SERMON XXI.

THE SIN AND CONSEQUENCES OF IMPATIENCE.

GENESIS XVI. 1, 2.

NOW SARAI, ABRAM'S WIFE, BARE HIM NO CHILDREN: AND SHE HAD AN HANDMAID, AN EGYPTIAN, WHOSE NAME WAS HAGAR: AND SARAI SAID UNTO ABRAM, BEHOLD NOW THE LORD HATH RESTRAINED ME FROM BEARING: I PRAY THEE GO IN UNTO MY MAID: IT MAY BE, THAT I MAY OBTAIN CHILDREN BY HER. AND ABRAM HEARKENED TO THE VOICE OF SARAI.

THE Holiness of God's moral government is often wonderfully associated with a sovereignty of mercy, exhibited in testifying that where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound. Rahab the harlot, is not only spared from the utter ruin of Jericho, but made a mother in Israel, and an ancestress of the promised Seed and Saviour. Abram and Sarai his wife are led to act inconsistently with their holy profession: but while they are justly, though tenderly

rebuked of God, Hagar the other party in this fault, hath an especial revelation of mercy vouchsafed unto her. The mighty race descended from her has been through many centuries, and still remains, one of the most amazing evidences of the truth of the divine word to which doubters may be referred for conviction, and believers for edification on their most holy faith. From the unadvised transaction recorded in the chapter under review, the Holy Ghost moreover draws, by St. Paul, a typical resemblance of the Law and the Gospel, of the heavy bondage of the one, and the glorious liberty of the other, under the figures of Hagar and Sarai, Ishmael, and Isaac. (Gal. iv.) This spiritual symbol will occur to be noticed, as we proceed in the patriarch's history. At present, the literal events will furnish ample matter for consideration. May the Holy Spirit make it useful and profitable! The whole transaction embraces three points of consideration.

I. THE FAULT COMMITTED.

II. THE CONSEQUENCES PRODUCED BY IT.

III. THE ESPECIAL DEALING OF GOD WITH HAGAR.

I. The subtlety, not less than the malignity of Satan, is remarkably exhibited in the method

is assaults, both against those whom he holds in his awful bondage, and those in the interference of divine mercy, and the of an Almighty Saviour have delivered being his eternal spoil and prey. To the he is especially dangerous, by transform- himself into an angel of light; and sedu- hem into sin, under pretence of advancing rposes and promises of God in their be-

He thus prevailed against Rebekah, most ly to anticipate the assurance, that Jacob l have the birthright and blessing instead au; and brought guilt, sorrow, shame, r upon herself and the son of her mistaken

He thus prevailed also against Sarai, and against her more established husband, by ing them to lay their feeble hands, and ; counsels towards perfecting the move- of the Most High : as if God were a man He should lie, and the Son of man that ould repent : as if the purposes of an eter- ind, and an unsearchable wisdom, needed eked out by human contrivances; or as if te power could not give effect to those ions which were conceived in the heart of and which his own assurance had engaged to perform. Abram was still childless,

and far advanced in years. Sarai was now herself aged; and, as she (looking only through the dark and distorting medium of sense,) imagined, hopelessly barren. True it was, that again and again both had been assured by Him in whom both believed, not only for the literal promise, but for its spiritual fulfilment, by the incarnation of God for the world's salvation, that Abram should have a son. But as the promise had never yet plainly undertaken that Sarai should be the mother of this child, her wily enemy set her upon a device of very crooked policy, which issued, (as all perversions of holy simplicity ever must issue) in sin and unhappiness.

Female slaves were invariably the property of the mistress in any family. The husband had no right whatever over them. Hagar thus belonged wholly to Sarai, her person, labour, children, were exclusively in her mistress' hand. Sarai therefore, now despairing of being herself a mother, gave her handmaid to be the wife, or rather the concubine, of Abram: thus hoping that she should have an interest, if not immediately maternal, yet much more direct and absolute, than that of mere adoption, in any son whom Hagar might bear to her husband. Thus

tan as I said, pervert the yearnings of her
 n the promised Redeemer, and consequent
 s for a posterity, into a guilty and inde-
 le distrust of God and of his word. O
 eedful to be aware of Satan's devices, and
 t upon divine truth in the Lord's word,
 ' than to consult flesh and blood for its
 retation and accomplishment.

ality of wives had already occurred, and
 bly was not very uncommon in this period
 : patriarchal world : but in the beginning
 : not so. God made his creatures male
 male, and joined them so in marriage, as
 petual institution, declaring, that as the
 n was bone of her husband's bone, and
 of his flesh ; "*therefore shall a man leave*
ather and his mother, and shall cleave
his wife, and they shall be one flesh."¹
 the Great Lawgiver of salvation ap-
 d, not to destroy, but to fulfil the law,
 ry man beyond the letter of its require-
 to the spiritual character, wherewith the
 f a believer's love beholds it invested, he
 ablished the original compact. And as if
 vere not enough, his apostle made mar-

¹ Gen. ii. 24.

riage the mystic symbol of that spiritual union which exists between Himself and his chosen bride, the whole body of the Church of God. "*We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. This is a great mystery,*" adds the apostle, "*but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*"¹ Therefore unless the soul's unfaithfulness to God in Christ be tolerable, the marriage vow whereby man and wife are bound together, is a vow of most awful solemnity. The cause of God rests upon its violation. Wrath and misery have ever dogged adultery at the heels, and marked it with an especial emphasis of divine displeasure. In this case, although custom—not, be it observed the permission of God—might make Sarai's conduct less guilty, than such a wilful breach upon marriage sanctities would now be, yet did she most unnaturally, and therefore most unwisely, tempt her husband to act inconsistently with his duty to her, to the institution of God, and to his own character as a holy servant of Jehovah.

Here, as in other exhibitions of their respective characters, we find Abram in possession and exercise of a stronger faith than Sarai—

¹ Eph. v. 30, 1

make God good of his own word to her substitutes Hagar for herself: and in lieu of an offspring, persuades him to . Abram had never looked to obtain issue by any other than a barren womb, he had not most unadvisedly laid the law in his way,"¹ and pressed it upon his duty towards himself, the world, and the commands of God. When our own appearances fail, weak faith projects strange means to accomplish its hopes, and even to be seduced by them. Ye therefore whose life is a life, and whose walk is now the walk seek its full assurance in your hearts: if God tarry in the fulfilment of his promise you may wait for Him; and that, putting your hands into the unerring hand of a God, your feet may not stumble upon the mountains of any deferred expectation. When the fulness of the time shall come, your faithful God will come also; his advent will be attended with mercies which could have been absent if it had taken according to the unwise season of your passions and unwise desires.

¹ Bishop Hall's Works, I. 28.

Abram saw the promise, though he saw not the means: but the importunity of his wife prevailed, and he became a partner in the fault of her unbelief. And doth not divine wisdom read us here a solemn lesson to walk by faith, and not by sight, in all our relations, and especially in those of the most intimate and endearing character? Bear the subject in mind, if you own the authority of God, profess to have embraced the promises of his salvation, and to walk with those who live as heirs together of the grace of life. Beware how your unbelief bring peril, not only upon yourselves, but upon the comfort of those, to whom your hearts are bound, and upon the peace of your families. Are you in difficulty or trial, and tempted to employ expedients, rather than to honour your Father which is in heaven, by ample and unhesitating reliance upon his word? Avoid the fault of Abram and Sarai, and you will avoid reaping the bitter fruits of their impatience and unbelief.

They do not appear to have sought the divine direction, either separately or together. There is no record of uplifted hands, and pleading hearts, that God would hasten the time for the fulfilment of his promise, in tenderness to their

feeble, trembling faith ; or that He would gird up the loins of their minds by his Holy Spirit, to wait in patience until faith should give place to enjoyment. If you consult with flesh and blood, and human wisdom, you will fall, and Satan will prevail. If you lay the matter before God, you will have the leading of the pillar of fire and of the cloud. Follow it ; and you will be guided by its unerring light into the land of promise. There is an inconsistency in unbelief, stamping it with the impress of folly, as broadly as with the impress of guilt. Sarai acknowledges that God Himself kept from her the blessing she desired, and blames Him not for this exercise of his sovereignty ; yet she would force Him, as it were, to communicate the object of her desire, by methods which her better judgment, and doubtless, her better principles condemned. Lord, increase our faith !

If the history had proceeded no further than this palpable and guilty error, if Sarai's impatience, and the sad facility wherewith Abram yielded, had been alone related, a spiritual mind would have had little difficulty in drawing the inference. Many words therefore cannot be needed to consider,

II. THE CONSEQUENCES PRODUCED BY THIS FAULT.

In every circumstance of life, an affectionate stedfastness of purpose is a mental and moral qualification, whereby, under the exercise of that divine power which renews the heart in the image of God, much evil may be prevented, and much glory may redound to the Most High. It had been well if Abram had denied the request of Sarai, (and no sordid concupiscence on his part was a fellow pleader with her desires;) if he had conjured her to wait patiently the leadings of that hand which had brought them forth from the country of their idolatries, and measured out blessings to them with exceeding abundance. If, however, after all his pleading, she had yet been obstinate in her device of infidelity, while he remained firm, and exclaimed in his soul's stedfastness, 'So will not I thus distrust and dishonour God,' both of them would have been saved from exhibiting to the Church a measure of weakness and sin, which now the Holy Ghost hath recorded, in order to teach the faithful in Jesus Christ, that unmingled holiness is found in Him alone; and that they must be followers of saints, whether living or departed, just as far, and only just so far as they are followers of Him.

But what was the mournful fact? “*Abram hearkened unto the voice of Sarai, And Sarai Abram’s wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived.*”¹ What follows this exhibition of sinful impatience on the one hand, and of sinful compliance with an indefensible weakness on the other? God came forth to testify his disapprobation. He permits Satan to produce, almost the inevitable fruits of departure from the godly simplicity of a healthy faith, in sorrow, misrule, and confusion. Family comfort is thus poisoned at its source, and family discord brings a long train of mischiefs into Abram’s tent. “*When Hagar saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.*”² The divinely inspired wisdom of Solomon had experience, from which to draw its lessons of holy instruction: and this sad example, no doubt, among the rest, was present to his mind, in the enumeration of those three things, for which the earth is disquieted, and of the four which it cannot bear, one of which

¹ Gen. xvi. 3, 4.

² Ibid. xvi. 4.

he testifieth to be "*a handmaid that is heir to her mistress.*"¹ And assuredly an offence against that purest and dearest of all human charities and sanctities, the relation of one man to one wife, according to the original appointment of God, is an engrafture of sin upon the course of life, calculated to produce the most unhappy results.

The handmaid not only expected that her child, if God should give her a son would be Abram's heir, and thus possess his temporal wealth; but above all, that he would be the progenitor of the promised Seed, and ancestor of the world's Deliverer. Here then was a point of imaginary exaltation, from which she looked down upon her mistress, less favoured of God, and therefore as she thought less worthy. And thus she became to Sarah what Peninnah became in later days to Hannah, when the Lord had shut up her womb, and her adversary made her fret, by triumphing over her for this lamented barrenness, notwithstanding God Himself withheld from her the treasure of the womb.

So far then was the scheme of Sarah from

¹ Prov. xxx. 23.

succeeding, however complacently she might have regarded it, that mischief and anguish heralded even the birth of the child; followed the son that God at length mercifully gave to herself, through the persecution of Ishmael; and made his posterity bitter adversaries of those who were born to Abram, under the promise in Isaac. Here is confusion and every evil work, brought by the great enemy, through this successful temptation, into a family, where a little while before, all was peace and holiness, and domestic love. "*How great a matter a little fire kindleth.*"¹ Watch we, then, and that with unslumbering perseverance of godly jealousy over the commencements of interruption to family concord. And be it ever in our remembrance, that as faith, even a simple reliance on God in his word, is the builder up of family peace,—so will the impatience of unbelief always be found one of the strongest and most efficient of all those disturbing forces, which exert their mischievous leverage to overturn the fabric of family love and joy.

Sarah's sense of wrong is now as clamorous, as her previous unbelief had been importu-

¹ James iii. 5.

nate. According to her own desire, the promised Father of nations, and Redeemer of human kind, is probably to be born of Hagar; yet her wounded feelings make all for which she had prayed, waited, nay sinned, appear as a despised thing compared with the pride of Hagar, and her own pride, which it wounded. How many rooms does sin find, wherein to lodge, when one sin hath opened the door of the heart. "*All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.*"¹ Other result was hardly to be expected; than that which happened: yet now Sarai's rage is even greater than her former impatience. Alas, we are selfish creatures, and self is a fearful tyrant, even in the minds of those whom the love of Christ, if the heart's unbelief did not oppose it so dreadfully, should constrain to deny themselves. Sarai said unto Abraham, "*My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee.*"² Here was sad abandonment of that ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of

¹ Esther v. 13.² Gen. xvi. 5.—

great price; and the manner wherewith Sarai repaid and revenged the pride and assumption of Hagar, surpasses the provocation itself, the punishment, (all things considered) is greater than the offence. Such is ever the character of sin. It grows on to more selfishness, until the transgressor loses sight of all tenderness and regard for others. The Devil is ever busy to make even the children of God conceal their own offences, by finding fault with others whom they have tempted, as authors of the consequences that do, and that must arise, but for which they should only blame themselves.

But what is the conduct of Abram in this irritating appeal to him? It seems to prove his freedom from all unhallowed love to Hagar, and to show that his consent had merely arisen from an unwise acquiescence in Sarai's mistaken expectation, of thus perpetuating a posterity and its mighty spiritual blessings to her husband. He said unto her, "*Behold thy maid is in thy hand: do to her as it pleaseth thee.*"¹ A soft answer turneth away wrath: and such an answer at least did the father of the faithful return to his inconsiderate wife. It deserves a

¹ Gen. xvi. 6.

question, however, whether his affection and loyalty to Sarai, and his love of peace were not carried to an unjustifiable extent. Was it indeed possible that Hagar should be thus about to fulfil those exceeding great and precious promises which Jehovah had made him? If so, did it not become his sacred duty to defend her from harm, and to hinder her from suffering by the ill temper and ill treatment of his wife? Every step which a believer takes from the simplicity that is in Christ, and from the exercise of faith in Christ, carries him forward in the sad employment of weaving a tangled web, wherein his own feet will probably be more and more ensnared; and from which only the mercy of an offended God can deliver him.

That mercy was not denied to any of the parties whose case is now under our consideration, although I can only briefly direct attention to

III. THE CONDUCT OF GOD TO HAGAR.

*"When Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face."*¹ Here was a new manifestation of rebellion and pride. It was her duty to have endeavoured to disarm her offended mistress, by lowliness and obedience; remem-

¹ Gen. xvi. 6.

bering her own offence, and those feelings in Sarai, for which she could not be without sympathy. But no; she is too great for reproof. She will peril her own unborn child;—she will peril her life;—she will peril the consequences of leaving a family where Jehovah is known and worshipped;—she will bring sorrow upon her husband and master,—but she will not remain in subjection. She follows the blind guidance of her own haughtiness of heart. And she has had imitators without number. There have been thoughtless, spiritually insensible, or most widely misled christian servants, who, in a moment of irritation, cast away their sense of duty, and their enjoyment of privilege, and fly to a desert, where no gracious refreshments are found, because they will not humble themselves in the sight of God and man.

Is Hagar then left to eat the fruit of this tree which her own hand hath planted, and which, as it is rebellion, may end in death? No; sin hath misled, but God will restore. Sin hath brought her into misery and bondage, but God will bring her back to liberty and peace. The Angel of the Lord, unquestionably the Angel of the covenant, found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, and said,

*"Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence comest thou, and whither wilt thou go? and she saith from the face of my mistress Sarai."*¹

the angel's salutation,—the greeting of the angel came to seek and to save that which was lost. "Hagar, Sarai's maid,"—to remind her that although she had fled from duty, she had not been able to break off the yoke of sin. And what is the voice of the Redeemer to the sinner, who goes into a strange land, sojourns in the wilderness of rebellion, and sets up the pole of his tent by the bitterness of those sins, which turn the heart from God and detain it an alien from his love? The conviction of guilt must be brought home to the mind. God's authority, God's law, must be asserted, and the transgressor must know that it is an evil and a bitter thing to disobey Him. A return to God must be demanded by the angel to Hagar,—"*Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her foot.*" The law is thus made a schoolmaster to bring the offender to Christ; and although the law hath hitherto dealt with him only according to the terrors of the law, yet is even

¹ Gen. xvi. 8.

² Gen. xxi.

quent step one of manifested mercy, when the heart in the obedience of faith has once said and acted upon the resolve, in the sufficiency of Almighty grace, "*I will arise and go to my Father.*"¹ Then do those radiant promises, of which some glimpses awakened hope, as faith made them visible to shine forth in their brightness, to bring peace and comfort, and joy into it.

The angel of the Lord said, "*I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude:*"² and then follow all those assurances concerning the character of her son's descendants, which have been, and are at this moment so wondrously fulfilled. "*Behold, it is added, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction.*"³ Yes, such is ever the language of the Angel of the covenant. The conscience-stricken offender may be mourning and miserable, and yet in much hardness of heart; scarcely lifting up any desires to God. But Jesus sees his afflictions, and hastens to relieve them, and fills the mind with peace and blessedness, by directing it to its home and its rest in Himself.

¹ Luke xv. 18.² Gen. xvi. 10.³ Gen. xvi. 11.

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Hagar's child must bear a name which shall be a memorial of her Redeemer's compassion and love. "*Ishmael, God shall hear.*" And when He brings his self-banished ones home again, He writes the record of his goodness, where they may continually turn the page, and read it. The angel's love melted and subdued Hagar's heart. She called the name of that well whereby she sat, Beer-la-hai-roi, "the well of the God of vision, or the well of the God that seeth me." Faith now reigneth over unbelief, humility over pride, love over rebellion, and God was dear to her. A sense of holy shame is awakened within her mind, and she cries, "*Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me?*" Here is the outpouring of a godly sorrow, confessing and abhorring its carelessness and ingratitude; owning the goodness and tenderness of the Saviour's preventing love, and all his compassion: and writing its own condemnation, in the moment when pardon and peace are bought, and sealed upon it. Alas, you who know the goodness and grace of Christ, let Hagar's example be recorded for your imitation. How often did the Angel of the Lord

nant look on you, wait on you, knock at the door of your hearts, beseech you to regard Him, but all in vain ! At length He allured you into some wilderness of providential, or spiritual trial, and there spake comfortably to you ; there vouchsafed to you visits of his goodness and grace ; there filled you with peace, which the world could neither give nor take away. You perhaps forgot Him and rebelled against Him, in the hour of holy and gracious privileges ; but his eye followed you into the desert, his goodness found you there, and his salvation there visited you. Beseech Him then to forgive your wanderings, pride, and hardness of heart ; implore Him to accompany you back again to the path of forsaken duties : and to be unto you, in that path, your fulness of comfort, and your fountain of unfailing holiness and joy.

SERMON XXII.

THE COVENANT RENEWED AND RE-
NEWED.

GENESIS XVII. 1, 2.

AND WHEN ABRAM WAS NINETY YEARS OLD AN
LORD APPEARED TO ABRAM, AND SAID UNTO
THE ALMIGHTY GOD ; WALK BEFORE ME, AND
BE PERFECT.

It is an error greatly injurious to the
eternal prosperity, that Christians are
to be contented with less than God
and promises to bestow upon them, in
son and salvation of their Great Redeemer
was so even with the father of the
Contented with Ishmael, and regarding
the accomplishment of his wishes, he
turned away by the sight of one born
flesh, from a spiritual seed, with all the
mercy which it enfolded. He must
be awakened to higher hopes, and more
prospects, after he had been slumbering
thirteen years from the birth of Ishmael.

cordingly, another appearance of the divine word is very graciously vouchsafed him, to extend his view beyond the narrow horizon whereby it was bounded, and once again to bid him live by faith and not by sight. From this new manifestation, three subjects arise for our contemplation,

I. THE PROMISES AND COVENANT ARE RENEWED TO ABRAM, WITH ADDITIONAL CLEARNESS OF STATEMENT AND ASSURANCE.

He has now ceased to expect, as well as to desire another child: but even after this long interval, his impatience in the matter of Hagar must be tenderly rebuked; and he must expect the fulfilment of the most astonishing undertaking on his behalf. "He must therefore gird up the loins of his mind; be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto him." Accordingly, that most cheering announcement is made by the Angel of the covenant, "*I am the Almighty God, or, God All-sufficient.*"¹ His faith must be brought into vigorous, into laborious exercise; and therefore its Author and Finisher, testifies of his own Omnipotence; so that his servant may not

¹ Rev. i. 8.

to be delivered from the furnace in Egypt: "*I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty; (El-Shaddai); but by my name Jehovah was I not known unto them.*"¹ "As by his *self-sufficiency* the Most High has enough in Himself to denominate Him completely blessed; so by his *all-sufficiency* He is able to communicate as much blessedness to his creatures, as He has made them capable of enjoying. He is therefore able not only to supply all their need; but to do for them exceedingly abundantly above all that they can ask or think."² Ye therefore, who love and glorify the Saviour, for all that He hath done, may well lean upon Him, for all that He hath promised. Your salvation is as well-ordered as God would plan it; and as secure as an Omnipotent Surety and an inexhaustible fulness could make it.

An encouragement so high and glorious as this being given, a suitable precept is grafted upon it, that Abram may bring forth fruit unto holiness. "*I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect, or upright, or*

¹ Exod. vi. 3.

² Ridley's Body of Divinity, as quoted by Serle, *Horæ Solitariae*, I. 45.

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ere." 1 Listen no more to unbelieving suggestions, which have their issues in crooked and evil policies. Tread the path of a simple religion. Be found unswervingly in the way of holy obedience, looking with a single eye to the vine glory, and casting all your care upon the rod. With a foundation of faith so immovable, with the Omnipotence of the Saviour, with depths of love such as his heart contains, and with the caution and consolation which are once suggested by the omniscience of our Lord, surely a Christian should simply commit all into his hand, and be solicitous only to perfect holiness in the fear of God. These considerations should swallow up all unbelieving solicitude concerning things future, as the earth swallowed up Korah and his company. They should teach the Christian to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; in the firm persuasion that all other things shall be added to him. If we are to walk with our Redeemer in holy communion, we must walk before God in holy sincerity.

This solemn preface being made, I go on through various parts of the chap-

1 Gen. xvii. 1.

renew that covenant already given to Abram, and in him to his posterity. Multitudes were promised to him, as descendants, including not merely those who should be natural children, born under the law, but a spiritual posterity, all indeed who being Christ's, should be truly, and in the highest acceptation, Abram's seed, and heirs according to the promise. From this high and heavenly genealogy does every Christian derive his gracious descent. His name is written in the book of life, as one of the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. That everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, is brought before him with reiterated pledges of divine truth and fidelity, every time he opens the Scriptures, and reads the promises of God in the gospel of salvation. And what can be given unto him, for all the necessities of his own gracious pilgrimage, and for the accomplishment of all his hopes, all his wishes, all his prayers for those most dear to him in the relations of life, than the assurance made to him representatively in Abram, and made as firmly, as if it were addressed immediately to himself, by an audible voice from heaven, "*I will be a God unto thee, and unto thy seed after thee.*"¹

¹ Rom. iv. 16. 17. Gal. iii. 28, 29. Gen. xvii. 7.

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covenant so renewed is called an everlasting covenant, or a covenant of eternity. Its outward signs and mode of dispensation were unchangeable; as when Baptism was substituted for circumcision; but itself remains immutable. And therefore, as it is all the salvation of the people of God, so should it be all their desire, and the sure, steadfast anchorage of their hearts, whenever the winds and waves of temptation beat upon that ark of mercy, the Church, wherein the hand of God hath placed them, and where they shall be kept by his power through faith unto salvation.

II. A DOUBLE SIGN IS NOW VOUCHSAFED TO ENCOURAGE THE PATRIARCH'S FAITH.

From the world's most remote and early history, parents were accustomed to name their children, either from some regard to their immediate condition, or from some prospect of future mercies vouchsafed them by the Father of God. Thus Eve called her first-born,

¹ Eve, not knowing the precise time when the promised Son was to appear, and doubtless very impatiently expecting his festation, exclaimed, we are told, on the birth of her first-born, *have gotten THE MAN*, even JEHOVAH HIS NAME. In this language, (for such is the literal reading of the text) she seems evidently to have imagined, that the promised Son was born into the world. But if such were her opinion,

for she said, “*I have gotten a man from the Lord.*”¹ Thus, when she bare another son, she named him *Seth*, that is, Appointed, “*for God*” said she “*hath appointed me another seed, instead of Abel whom Cain slew.*”² Thus also, Lamech named his son, *Noah*, that is, Rest, or Comfort; in expectation of consolation from him, because of the ground which the Lord had cursed. In this manner we may imagine the parents of the friend of God to have given him the name of Abram, a high father in the undiscerned, but overruling spirit of prophecy. And truly he was a high father, as the honoured ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the flesh.* When however the covenant already made, was renewed unto him, with additional light, and solemn memorials, God saith “*Thou shalt no more be called Abram—a high father; but Abraham*, the father of multitudes,³ the first letter of the Hebrew word, signifying a multitude being inserted in his former name. The reason is immediately added, “*For a father of*

reason or other, she must have believed, that the predicted MAN would also be JEHOVAH HIMSELF.”—*Faber on the Patriarchal, Levitical, and Christian Dispensations, Vol. I. pp. 201, 202. See also the Note appended to those pages.*

¹ Gen. iv. 1.

² Gen. iv. 25.

³ Gen. xvii. 5.

many nations have I made thee."¹ Even so Jacob was afterwards called *Israel*, when as a prince he had wrestled with God, and had prevailed. Still later in the church's history, Solomon was called *Jedediah*, because the Lord loved him. In this important change of name, it was intended that the friend of God should be known through all the ages of redemption; and that this alteration should prefigure the instatement of believers from among all nations, and kindred, and people, and languages, into the covenant and faith of Abraham.²

The same letter of number, and with the same mysterious significancy, is introduced into the name of Abram's wife, when a child is first promised immediately and unequivocally to herself. Hitherto she had been called *Sarai*, my princess, which she had been to Abraham: but now, *Sarah*, a princess, a more general term, and emphatically her due, as the mother of many nations, both in the flesh, and in the Lord. All holy believers of her own sex are called her children by the Apostle Peter:³ and St. Paul makes her the type and allegory of the glorious antitype, the Jerusalem which is above.

¹ Gen. xvii. 6.

² 1 P

which is free, and which is the common mother of all the family of God.¹ Kings of people were to descend from her. The promise was literally fulfilled, in the long royal line of Judah, and in the revolted sovereigns of Israel. But they who understand and prize the blessings of a spiritual descent, may regard her with the reverence of a closer and dearer claim, than any which ancestry, conferring this world's royalty, can set up: for in the covenant given to her, as she was represented in Abraham, and, like his own portion, embracing the promises of Jehovah, they are made kings and priests unto God. Even through that promised seed, of which she was to be the favoured mother, they have become "*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that they should show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.*"²

God, in his dealings with the ancient Church, occasionally assumed a name, which might impress the minds of its members with the recollection of some extraordinary mercy. This is his name, whereby He shall be called, "*The*

¹ Gal. iv. 26.

² 1 Peter ii. 9.

*Lord our Righteousness."*¹ And when the Father would "*bring again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.*"² He styles Himself, "*The God of peace.*" Elsewhere He is Jehovah and Shammah, "*The Lord is there.*" On the other hand, when new covenant blessings are opened to, and conferred upon the Church, the glorious Head of all its members gives that Church a new name, even as the wife assumes the name of her husband, and the bride that of the bridegroom. "*Thou shalt be called,*" said God to Zion, "*by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed desolate. But thou shalt be called Hephzibah, (my delight is in her,) and thy land, Beulah, (that is married; for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.*"³ In the blessings of justification and adoption, they who are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, have a name given unto them, a new name, which hidden, as their life now is with Christ in God, they may not themselves know, in all its preciousness: b

¹ Jer. xxxiii. 16. ² Heb. xiii. 20. ³ Isaiah lvi. 5. lxi.

which, as they adhere to the truth and precepts of their Saviour, and overcome in the might of an Omnipotent Redeemer, shall be made legible to them by the spirit of adoption, as to the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

III. A SEAL IS APPENDED TO THE COVENANT FOR FURTHER SURETY TO THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM.

*"This is my covenant which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee: every man-child among you shall be circumcised: and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you."*¹ The engagements of men with each other are certified in various methods: and God hath condescended to similar means for the establishment of his promised mercies in Jesus Christ. Sometimes they give their word: and God who cannot lie hath pledged his own inviolable promise. Sometimes they make written engagements: and in the gospel *"these things were written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life in his name."*² Sometimes witnesses are called in for assurance. And *"there are three that bear*

¹ Gen. xvii. 10, 11.

² John xx. 31.

witness in earth; the spirit, and the water, and the blood :¹ besides that internal witness, which every believer hath within himself. Sometimes an oath is to men for confirmation an end of all strife: and God "*willing to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.*"²

Again, men affix *their seals* to covenant engagements. God therefore, besides the privy seal of his own engagements to his children, on their hearts, when they are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, hath appended the broad outward seal of his covenant by visible symbols, for the confirmation of faith, and to assure the truth of the promises. Such a seal was *Circumcision*, to that covenant of eternity made with Abraham in Christ Jesus, to the world of believers. "*He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised: that righteousness*

¹ 1 John v. 8.

² Heb. vi. 16—18.

*might be imputed to them also. And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only : but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had, being yet uncircumcised."*¹ And although this very significant rite was adopted by many nations, without the law of God, or any acceptance at his hands, yet, as continued in Abraham's posterity, according to the promise, it was the uniting principle of the whole Church, however dispersed into various families. And thus there is one baptism in the Christian Church : as there is "*one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.*"² The sacraments of both dispensations are seals of the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ. They are God's attestation that He hath given unto sinners eternal life, and that this life is in his Son ; and they are so received by every true believer.

Circumcision therefore, was not merely a sign to represent, but a seal to ratify the covenant of grace to Abraham and his posterity in faith. Moreover its character was not merely

¹ Rom. iv. 11, 12.

² Eph. iv. 5.

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*sacramental, but typical; It symbolized man's state by nature, as born into the world an heir of guilt and pollution, and testified "that without the shedding of blood is no remission of sins." It shadowed forth the great and glorious righteousness which is by the faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe. It especially regarded and pictured the mortification of the heart—even the death unto sin, and the new birth unto righteousness;—the inward circumcision of soul and spirit. And such was its gracious purport, as pressed upon the Jewish disciples at Rome by the great apostle, when he said, "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly: and circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."*¹ In each of these points of view, it hath reference to the Christian circumcision, made by the Holy Ghost without human hands, upon all the members of the Lord, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ; being "*buried with Him in baptism, wherein also they*

¹ Rom. ii. 28, 29.

*are risen with Him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead."*¹

But, it may be asked, Why is Baptism now substituted under the Christian Dispensation, for that rite which was the seal of salvation, under the Old Testament? Simply because that atoning blood, of which it typified the necessity for remission of sins, having been shed, the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit, whereof water is the emblem, is effectually secured by that great and glorious redemption-price paid by the Son of God upon the cross. Circumcision had reference to a Saviour, who should redeem men unto God by his blood. Baptism, beholding the ransom paid, buried its subjects unto the death of sin, that "*like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so they also might walk in newness of life.*"² And it is a remarkable coincidence, that circumcision was instituted in the very place, (Hebron) and at the very time of the year, where, and when John was born, who changed Circumcision into Baptism.³

Of this evangelical circumcision, every mem-

¹ Col. ii. 12. ² Rom. vi. 4. ³ Lightfoot's Works, II. 91.

ber of the Christian Church, admitted within its pale of sacred and substantial privilege by Baptism, hath been made a partaker. He has been constituted "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." It hath not only an outward sign, but an inward and spiritual grace: and I cannot but think, that when this initial Sacrament of redeeming mercy is separated from the mysterious operation of the Holy Ghost, we reduce it to a form, very far below the intention of the great Head, and Saviour, and Prophet of the Church, and the gracious blessings which He meant it to convey. No man, indeed, may take upon himself to separate the effectual working of the Holy Spirit from Baptism, without making void all the ordinances of the visible Church, which become ceremonies, idle, and worse than idle, except for the faith that the Holy Spirit may be in them, and truly is in them, to all, unto whom the Father grants the faith of his presence. But subsequent life must exhibit the power of this grace, or the consequences will be dreadful. "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not (baptized or unbaptized) shall be damned.*"

¹ Mark xvi. 16.

Amongst the many practical inferences deducible from the subject, I can only mention three of a very obvious and simple character.

I. *The solicitude of Abraham for the child, whom God had already given him.* The son of the promise is now to be given; but Abraham cannot overcome the yearnings of nature; and fearful lest his eldest born should be altogether rejected, his parental feelings almost wrestle with the promises of God, and he cries, —“*O that Ishmael might live before Thee!*”¹ As though he had pleaded, “I know that one shall be born from me and Sarah my wife, for whom Thou wilt reserve thy especial favour; but let not the son whom Thou hast already given me be cast out and neglected. Continue him, I beseech Thee unto me, and bless him also.” How beautiful the pattern of parental solicitude which this earnest prayer exhibits! My christian brethren, to whom the God of all the families of the earth hath given children, as arrows in the hand of a mighty man, do you thus watch at the gate of mercy with a similar petition? Do you pray that your children may live before God? Extend your prayers, I be-

¹ Gen. xvi. 18.

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 seech you, to spiritual blessings; and plead for them, as the supreme good. Plead that the life of your children's souls may be precious in the sight of your own covenant God; and await his answer, in the unwearied hope of faith and patience.—“*As for Ishmael, I have heard thee.*” If your efforts and your prayers be limited to the attainment of earthly prosperity and lengthened life for them, God may hear you in the letter, but may send leanness withal into their souls; and you may bring a curse upon them, and not a blessing.*

II. The promptness of Abraham's obedience.

1 “A significant indication that something was intended beyond a merely temporal meaning and fulfilment, in the covenant of Ishmael is contained in the fact, that this covenant was given, as the immediate answer of prayer; of the prayer of Abraham for a spiritual blessing. The sacred record moreover is careful to inform us, that Ishmael obtained the promise of a divine blessing, for a special reason, because he was Abraham's seed. In the natural favour of parental love, Abraham had prayed, that God would grant him in favour of his son Ishmael the blessings just promised to the child of Isaac who was yet unborn. “And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!”—a prayer, which the consoling answer of Jehovah is, “As for Ishmael, I have heard thee.” Then follows the promise concerning him, which is afterwards repeated with the remarkable addition, “And of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because thy seed.” Foster's Mahometanism Unveiled. 1. 118.

* See a remarkable anecdote in Ruti's Life of Calamy. pp. 500. &c.

to the command of God. When the gracious promise was made him, he fell on his face, and laughed,—not doubtingly, but delightedly, as well as reverentially. “*He staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.*”¹ His was the joy of faith; for no doubt at this time the eye of his belief was partially opened to see the day of the Son of Man; and he saw it, and was glad. That faith led him to an immediate regard of the divine command. The self-same day, he himself, his son, and his household were circumcised. He makes no difficulty, sues for no exemption on the ground of his own age, or all the variety of excuses which a rebellious heart might have offered, and which would probably have been, not merely plausible, but convincing to the world around him. He makes haste and delays not to keep the commandments of God. And when covenant promises come home to the heart in their power and sweetness, realized there by the hand of the Holy Ghost, obedience to covenant duties must be not only performed without murmuring, but offered with delight. It must not be a matter of calculation

¹ Rom. iv. 20.

whether these duties be painful or pleasant to flesh and blood. One question is alone to be asked by every christian,—“Is this duty according to God’s pleasure and appointment? Then will I rise up in the strength of God to perform it; and I will run the way of his commandments, as He shall set my heart at liberty.” Shew that you have indeed embraced the promises, by holy and self-denying zeal for all the precepts of God.

III. *The willing submission of Abraham’s household.* A rite is enjoined upon them, painful in itself, and calculated to bring them into contempt with the people, among whom they dwelt. It might be fitting for Abraham himself, and his son Ishmael to submit to its shame and anguish. But why should they who were born in his house—why especially should they who were only bought with money, and might therefore be supposed to have little sympathy with their master’s relation to God, be called upon for the same sacrifice? and that sacrifice being demanded, why should they make it without one recorded murmur? The question can only be answered by the supposition, that Abraham had been blessed in teaching them the will of the Lord, and making them like him.

believers in the salvation of the promised Seed. Exercise the same holy diligence and devotedness, in those families, at whose head God hath placed you; and look to a gracious present reward, in seeing them, or some of them at least, prepared to follow you in the way of life, by taking up their cross, and bearing it cheerfully before God in the universality of holy obedience.

SERMON XXIII.

THE ANGEL JEHOVAH APPEARS TO ABRAHAM.

GENESIS XVIII. 17—19.

THE LORD SAID, SHALL I HIDE FROM ABRAHAM THAT THING WHICH I DO: SEEING THAT ABRAHAM SHALL SURELY BECOME A GREAT AND MIGHTY NATION, AND ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED IN HIM? FOR I KNOW HIM THAT HE WILL COMMAND HIS CHILDREN AND HIS HOUSEHOLD AFTER HIM, AND THEY SHALL KEEP THE WAY OF THE LORD TO DO JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT; THAT THE LORD MAY BRING UPON ABRAHAM THAT WHICH HE HATH SPOKEN OF HIM.

THE great operations of nature upon the surface of the world, are usually preceded by signs and warnings of their approach. Even the copious showers, whereby the fields are refreshed, testify of their coming by the lowering sky, and by some heavy drops, to assure us that the windows of heaven are about to be opened, and that there is a sound of abundance of rain. A similar procedure may be observed, both in the general history of the Redeemer's Church,

and in the less obvious records of individual experience. The promise made to Abraham, and embraced by him through faith, both for himself, and for his gracious posterity, was now upon the eve of fulfilment: and therefore clearer, and more frequent manifestations of the divine purposes are made to him than heretofore. Those which are at present to be considered, demand and deserve our devout attention. May the Author and Finisher of Abraham's faith, bless the consideration to our hearts!

There are two principal subjects, into which this portion of his history may be divided.

I. THE MYSTERIOUS VISIT WITH WHICH HE WAS FAVOURED.

It came gradually, and almost imperceptibly, like the approach of day to the earth: or as the Sun of Righteousness in Christian experience of divine mercy, so often rises upon man's heart for life eternal, with healing in his wings. In this case, as in the kingdom of God within the soul, there was "*first the blade, then the ear, and after that, the full corn in the ear.*"¹

(1.) *The Manifestation itself. Jehovah appeared unto Abraham in the plains* (or under

¹ Mark iv. 28.

the oaks,) of *Manre*." ¹ But how was the amazing disclosure made? He sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; employed, it may be, in considering the goodness of God, and calling upon his soul to exercise faith on promises lately renewed, in a manner the most gracious, but still in no sensible train of accomplishment; and probably also, calling upon God to strengthen his soul, still to wait the fulness of Jehovah's time, when the blessing should be given and enjoyed. He sat there also, as it would appear on the watch for any travellers who might be oppressed and fainting beneath the noon-day sun; to bring them into his tent, for rest and refreshment. And the mind of a believer will always find itself expanded with love to man, while it dwells upon the assurances of a Saviour's love to itself, and communes with the throne of grace in prayer. While thus employed, "*Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and lo, three men stood beside him: (or rather opposite to him as he sat, and at some little distance from him, and when he saw them he ran to meet them from the tent-door, and bowed himself toward the ground.)*" ² Upon the nature of the

¹ Gen. xviii. 1.

² Ibid. xviii. 2.

three mysterious visitants, various opinions have been held in the Church. Many of its early fathers maintained, that the adorable Trinity thus appeared to Abraham in a visible form : and their conclusion is adopted by learned and holy writers in more modern times.¹ Among the rest, Lightfoot, in his summary of this chapter, observes, “ The three persons in the Trinity dine with Abraham, and again foretel the birth of Isaac. The Son and the Holy Ghost go down to Sodom ; but the first person in the Trinity stays with Abraham, and condescends to his prayer, as long as he asks.”² To my own mind, however, this view of the case is encompassed with difficulties hardly to be surmounted ; and especially with those arising from a visible presence of God the Father, and God the Holy Ghost, invested with the form of our human nature, and with the declaration made in the next chapter, by two of the three, “ that Jehovah had sent them to destroy Sodom.” The general and most simple conclusion seems to be, not that it was a manifestation of the whole Trinity, nor yet, that the three who appeared were created angels, taking

¹ See Witsius on the Covenant, quoted by Biddulph.

² Lightfoot's Works, II. 91.

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he likeness of men; but that two were indeed of the number of these ministering spirits, while the third was the Lord of angels Himself, whom we have already seen brought before the eyes of Abraham, for his furtherance and joy of faith. It was indeed the opinion of the Jewish doctors, that three angels were sent to Abraham, that more things than one should be sent by the hand of one of the high angels. The first angel as they affirm, was sent to shew glad tidings unto him, that Sarah should bear Isaac the second, to deliver Lot from the overthrow of Sodom; the third, to destroy that guilty city, and all who partook its iniquities. To the office, the Angel of the everlasting covenant for in all that occurred between Him, and his servant Abraham, if a divine person be openly described, there is no meaning in language, and we can have no assurance that God ever spake or acted as He is represented in Scriptures of his own truth. That one of angels was indeed over all, God blessed evermore, we learn infallibly; because the

1 See Ainsworth's Annotations upon the passage.

incommunicable name of Jehovah is ascribed to Him more than ten times in this and the following chapter.

When then, as invested with some visible manifestation of majesty, the patriarch addressed himself with the lowliness of civil reverence ; and as the disclosure of superhuman glory had not yet been fully made ; beseeching Him, and his companions in travel, to enter and refresh themselves within the tent. And thus, in the course of that hospitality wherewith the patriarch exhorts us not to forget to entertain strangers,¹ he himself, and Lot, the same who had entertained angels unawares. It is a fact wondrous in itself, and deeply interesting to contemplate, that the Lord of life and death should tread the plains, and shelter himself beneath the oaks of Mamre, to bring blessing to Abraham : even as, when He afterwards assumed our flesh, and tabernacled in it, sat wearied and thirsty by the well of Sychar, that He might seek and save a sinful man of that unbelieving city. But as nothing is too hard for Omnipotence to perform, nothing is so low, as to be beneath the con-

¹ Heb. xiii. 2.

descensions of Infinite Love ! It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world,—that the Son of God took human nature upon Him, to seek and to save that which was lost.

Abraham and Lot entertained angels un-awares. Deeply and abundantly was the hospitality of each recompensed and overpaid. "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*"¹ Was it more Elijah's or the widow's gain, when he took of her cake, and of her oil from the bottom of the cruse ? Was it more the happiness of Zaccheus, that he received the Lord gladly ; or of Jesus who condescended to abide at his house ? There can be no hesitation about the answer. And let me ask those who have received any of the servants of God, and given them the prophet's chamber, and the prophet's meal, whether they have not found their guests leaving a blessing behind them, in some fragrance of the alabaster box of ointment, when they talked of the love of Jesus, carried them, by Him to the mercy seat of God in prayer, and bade them know in the depths of gracious experience, that where two or three were met

¹ Acts x. 35.

together in his name, there was He in the midst of them ?

The Word of God is coming on a message of judgment to Sodom : but He stops by the way, upon an errand of love to Abraham. Of this nature is the high commission wherewith the Father hath endowed Him. He is on the way at this hour, to take vengeance on them who know not God, and obey not his Gospel. But He tarried for a while in the tents of earth ; and He tarries at this moment in the tabernacles of glory above, upon employments of mercy to his people—to purify every believer in his name, from sin, in the laver of his atonement, and to number that happy object of his love among his saints, for glory everlasting. Nay, He tarries to knock at the door of all our hearts. Open them, O Holy Spirit of God, by the Almightyness of thy grace ! And then, blessed Saviour, enter them with Thyself and thy salvation ; and manifest Thyself unto them, as Thou dost not unto the world !

(2) *The communications vouchsafed to Abraham were entirely worthy of the manifestation which the Son of God had condescended to make. That entertainment, which a believing heart provides for the Saviour in the glad*

readiness of its faith, He delights to accept; for his own Holy Ghost hath made the preparation within it: and He invariably blesses the exhibition of those graces, which He has implanted in the heart. Accordingly we find, that when Abraham's feast was ended, the angels said unto him, "*Where is Sarah thy wife?*" And he said, "*Behold, in the tent.*"¹ Then follows the promise, which Omnipotence alone could make; and which therefore He in whom that Almightyness was vested, could alone pronounce; "*He said, I will certainly return unto thee, according to the time of life, (either at the corresponding period of the following year, or when Sarah might become a mother in the course of nature,) and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son.*"² Men exercise a morbid sensibility towards any doubt of their truthfulness, when they promise to others; and deeply resent the least hesitation to give them full and immediate credit for all they undertake. Christ, on the other hand, whom the unbelief of his children every moment dishonours, and the rooted infidelity of his enemies every moment defies, meekly and mercifully repeats his promises, and rebukes only thus, and by fulfilling them.

¹ Gen. xviii. 9.² Gen. xviii. 10.

As the blessing approaches—nay at the very time when it is about to be conferred, Sarah hesitates to give God credence in his announcement; as though the tidings were too joyful to be true. She laughed—not in the joy of Abraham's simple faith on a former occasion, when the same promise was made, but with a mixture of incredulity and delight: and she is reproved by that unwearied love, wherewith, when sin aboundeth in the children of God, grace doth much more abound. She is rebuked with a mild dignity, which the mercy that dwells in the heart, and rises from the sympathies of Christ can only exhibit—rebuked both for the first unbelief, and for the subsequent falsehood, wherewith she vainly endeavoured to cloke her sin. “*She denied, saying, I laughed not. And He said, Nay, but thou didst laugh.*”¹ May God pity, pardon, and remove our unbelief! Is any thing too hard for the Lord? Does one trembler here look for mercy; feel the sweetness of a promise; feel the need of it, as God in his Son hath held it forth to the Christian's hope; and yet doubt whether it be not too much to expect? Remember his

¹ Gen. xviii. 15.

own encouragement to prayer. Plead with Him, that the hand of the Holy Ghost may lift you above the dark valley of distrust, and fix you upon the faithfulness of those engagements, which are sealed and made sure in the blood of Christ. "*Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.*"¹ Enter upon a present enjoyment of all the exceeding great and precious promises, by a present faith; and let your soul delight itself in their fatness. "*Blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her of the Lord.*"²

These things being done in the tent, "*the men rose up from thence, and looked towards Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.*"³ He could not lightly resign a fellowship so delightful as this. His heart had burned within him, while the Saviour talked with him, and if he could not secure that Saviour's stay, he would at least attend Him for awhile. And sure I am, that they who have been with Him on the mount, and found it good to be there, have eagerly sought to prolong their happy communion, and felt their hearts sink within them, when He hath

¹ Mark ix. 25.² Luke i. 45.³ Gen. xviii. 16.

gone up from them in the place where He talked with them. Abraham's zeal for companionship with his Lord, had a gracious return: for, as on the evening of his resurrection Jesus opened the understandings of his two disciples, to understand the Scriptures, while He talked with them by the way, and sat at meat with them in the house where they had constrained Him to enter—so did He inform his disciple, at this time, of his purposes of judgment to others, as well as of unbounded mercy to himself. *“The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation; and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in Him?”*¹ Mark then, how graciously our Lord manifests his purposes, when He manifests them at all, to those who follow Him in faith. *“He that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him.”*² *“Henceforth,”* said He to his disciples, *“I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I*

¹ Gen. xviii. 17, 18.² John xiv. 21.

*have made known unto you."*¹ The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.

Mercies from God never come alone to his holy servants. One leads another by the hand; and they succeed each other through every step of the pilgrimage. To him that hath shall more be given, and he shall abound. Abraham is to be a great and mighty nation; and he is to be the depository of divine intentions: partly to distinguish him, and partly because he will be the medium of testifying of God's truth to succeeding generations. When the heart-searching Saviour hath tried his servants and found them faithful, they may expect nearer and dearer communications of his will. "*I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.*"² He would promote the glory of God in his own family; and he shall have an opportunity of exercising his zeal and love for others. He has also relations in Sodom, and they shall be delivered. The advantages of family religion, never stay

¹ John xv. 15.

² Gen. xviii. 19.

within the threshold where they are first communicated. They who are witnesses for God within the doors of their own habitations, shall bear testimony farther than they imagine; and they shall be blessed in their deed.

The denunciations being made against Sodom, two of the angels departed thitherward, on their solemn errand, of inquisition and vengeance. But Abraham stood yet before the Lord. How then did he employ these privileged moments of holy intercourse with Jehovah? Not in improving the manifestations of love and favour already vouchsafed him, for his own personal or family advantage; but in disinterestedly attempting to deprecate the wrath of Jehovah against the guilty cities wherein Lot dwelt. I notice then,

II. THE INTERCESSION OF ABRAHAM IN FAVOUR OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

It sufficed him not to stand yet before the Lord: he availed himself of the tokens of divine condescension, to draw nigh unto Jehovah, in the full and confiding supplication of that holy familiarity which the great Mediator of the covenant allowed him. His prayer was fervent,—it was that of lowly reverence, and soul-prostration; but it was also that of faith in his

Saviour's mercy. "*Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*"¹ He does not instance Lot by name, but includes him among the holy servants of God, who (as he trusted) might yet be found within the guilty circuit of the five cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar; of which the first was the metropolis in greatness as in crime, and therefore put for all the rest. Among them all, he hoped that fifty righteous yet remained. He exercised the judgment of that holy charity, which sits so gracefully upon the children of God, in forming their opinion of others; but which is, alas, a grace so rare, and of such little growth among those, who knowing their own guilt, and utter hopelessness, except from the Sovereignty of mercy to them in a vicarious Atonement, should therefore hope the best concerning others.

Abraham's plea is remarkable; "*Wilt thou also destroy, and not spare the city for the fifty righteous that are (or may be) therein?*"² If the holy seed were thus to be the substance of the cities of the plain; and their indwelling to be, as it were, a shield interposed between

¹ Gen. xviii. 23.

² Gen. xviii. 24.

the guilty and the wrath of God, how safely may the righteousness of Him, in whom his true disciples are the righteousness of God, be represented before the throne, and pleaded in God's hearing as an infinitely valid reason, why He should turn away from his anger, and spare, and be appeased! Does not a praying Christian fitly look unto the Judge of all the earth to do right, whensoever he brings forward the Righteousness of God his Saviour? Blessed be God, there is One, in the dark and dismal guiltiness that overspreads the Sodom of our nature, able to save his servants from their sins; and whose Righteousness is unto all, and upon all them that believe. Are any of you standing before the Lord, admitted into a happy nearness of communion with Him? Improve his presence, in behalf of those who are yet lying in darkness and the shadow of death; as the Church in the Song of Solomon is zealous for the Gentiles who knew not God, "*We have a little sister; what shall we do for her in the day when she shall be spoken for?*"¹ And while the unbelievers around you, little reck of your appeals to the mercy of God in their

¹ Cant. viii. 8.

favour, put Him in remembrance concerning them. Give Him no rest, in the hope that He may yet bring them unto Jesus, and make them pass from death unto life, in his work of Almighty mercy upon them. When Augustus Cæsar overcame his rival Anthony, and took Alexandria, its citizens expected only ruin ; but he proclaimed its pardon, for the sake of his friend Arius the philosopher who dwelt there. With what assurance then, of hope should Christians be remembrancers with God, that He may spare the transgressors around them, for his Son's sake, who dwelt among them ; who came to save even the chief of sinners ; and with whose glorious mediatorial work and Person, the Father is always well pleased ! If there be a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments, and which shall walk with the King of Saints in white, because they are worthy in his worthiness, they ought to be unwearied and fervent advocates for the dead and careless souls in whose neighbourhoods they dwell. "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*"¹

The holy followers of God are the support

¹ James v. 16.

and stability of any land. Laban's flock increases for Jacob's sake. A blessing falls, not only on Potiphar's house, but upon Egypt, because of Joseph. When the holy seed that grows in any outward Church, among its unbelieving and ungodly members, is ripened and gathered in, God will pull down its hedges, and lay it waste, and command his clouds that they rain no rain upon it. He can do nothing until they be out of the way; and by their holy zeal, the anger of God is sometimes turned away from the camp of Israel; as the plague was stayed, when Phineas stood up and executed judgment; or as God pardoned the host, when Joshua stood on his side, in the matter of Achan.

My Christian brethren, who have graciously been taught the holy art of wrestling with God for yourselves, abound in intercession for others. Your hearts will surely then be enlarged, when you can pour them out for guilty, godless relatives; for a guilty and a godless people; that they may be snatched as brands out of the burning. Open your mouth wide, and God will fill it with answered prayer. If God hath testified to you, in the Bible, of his coming wrath against sinners;—if your faith hath received the record;—if you tremble for them, while,

sunk in unbelief, and alienation, and insensibility, they care not for themselves, why is the knowledge of their peril given, except that you should abound in petition for them? When the spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon you, should it not overflow from your hearts on their behalf? We have here the first recorded prayer: and let us not forget that its character is purely intercessory.

Divine condescension emboldens Abraham to persist in beseeching Jehovah's mercy towards these guilty cities. Every petition brings him nearer to a number so small, that surely he may not hesitate to think he has satisfied the requirement of God, and ensured the safety of Sodom. And at every petition does the mysterious angel graciously and tenderly tempt him to go onwards; until at length he comes within ten persons: they, he doubts not may be found, without passing beyond the family of Lot. Fearing therefore to trespass further upon the condescending grace, which had hitherto borne with him, he ceases to pray. So long however, as the petitioner continues to ask, does God continue to grant. Abraham wearies in prayer, while Jehovah is unwearied in hearing and answering his supplication. Shall you then, to

whom the life of prayer is the life of peace, and joy, and privilege, as well as the life of appointed duty, restrain prayer before God, while unbelievers are perishing around you; while your Father who is in heaven, is always more ready to give than you to ask; and while He waits to bless you, for yourselves and others, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus?

The mediation of Abraham was unsuccessful, not, as I imagine, because God by some secret impulse overruled him from praying longer, in behalf of Sodom, as when he closed the prophet's lips from interceding for his sinful heritage, "*Therefore pray not thou for this people; neither lift up cry nor prayer for them; neither make intercession to Me: for I will not hear thee,*"¹—but because Abraham himself thought his request now secure, and ceased to wrestle with God. There is however a Mediator, whose Advocacy never fails, because his plea of merit is infinitely precious in the Father's eye; and because He ever liveth to make intercession for all who come unto God by Him. Seek the footstool of mercy in his name: "*Ask, and*

¹ Jer. vii. 16.

*ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you."*¹

And you, for whom they who have gracious access to their Father in heaven, are pleading ever with groanings that cannot be uttered, while you are yourselves careless of your misery and danger,—you, over whose heads God's saints behold the sword of his justice and vengeance hanging as by a thread, while you are banquetting beneath it unmoved and secure, I intreat the mercy of the Most High, on your behalf. You against whom the Daniels whose fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ in prayer, see the hand writing upon the wall which declares you to be weighed and found wanting, doomed, sentenced, and about to die for ever, while you, slumbering, cannot observe the sentence, because the god of this world hath blinded your eyes,—I pray, in deep anxiety for your deliverance, that the God of heaven may enable you to discover that there is but a step between you and death. *"As it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded: but the same day that*

¹ Matt. vii. 7.

*Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man shall be revealed.*¹ Do not think that because you are insensible, God is forgetful; that because you dream of security, He will sleep also, and never awaken you. “*To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*” *Behold now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation!*”² The Lord may be now tarrying, while some of Abraham’s spiritual children are imploring Him to save you. He stops perhaps, until their prayer is poured out, and their lips closed, and then He may go towards you in the city of your sins. If He find you there, find you out of Jesus Christ, find you girdled with walls of brass in your unbelief, will they be too strong for Him to break? The men of Sodom might have resisted an earthly foe, but when the fire and brimstone fell down from heaven, the dreadful tempest did its office, and the sinners were overwhelmed in that awful deluge of flame. You can no more put aside the Arm of God, than they could avert the storm of fire. Arise

¹ Luke xvii. 28—30.² Psalm xcv. 7.³ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

then, and pray for yourselves. Are you guilty? Christ will be your Righteousness. Are you polluted? He will be your Sanctification. Are you in spiritual bondage? He will be your Almighty Redemption. Are you lying among the pots of habitual sin? He will create you anew unto good works, and *"ye shall be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."*¹

¹ Psalm lxxviii. 13.

SERMON XXIV.

THE FORTUNES OF LOT.

GENESIS XX. 1.

AND ABRAHAM JOURNEYED FROM THENCE TOWARD THE SOUTH COUNTRY, AND DWELT BETWEEN KADISH AND SHUR, AND SOJOURNED IN GERAR.

THE promise, to which Abraham's hope had long clung, was now about to be accomplished, according to the set time that God had declared to him, in the plain of Mamre. But the ark of his faith was to be tossed to and fro, by waves of temptation and sorrow, before the assured season of its rest arrived, in the fulfilment of divine undertaking concerning him. The love of man which ever dwells in the heart, where the love of God hath taken up its abode,—the yearnings of affection for his kindred,—his holy submission to the judgments of the Most High,—and the stability of his confidence were to be

sternly tried, before the birth of that son, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed, as well as himself and Sarah. Some of these exercises are now to be placed in a brief and rapid sketch before you. O that God the Holy Ghost may bring them home with Almighty power to every one, whether a follower of Abraham's faith, or yet lying in the sin and peril of wilful unbelief !

I. THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

It is the duty of an earthly magistrate diligently to examine into those offences, which his office calls upon him to punish. And "*shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*"¹ The cry of those guilty cities had come up to God, because their sin was very grievous. But instead of visiting them with instant severity and wrath, and raining the deluge of fire and brimstone upon them at once from heaven, He determines to make, as it were, an inquisition upon the spot. "*I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me : and if not I will know.*"² The Righteousness of Jehovah,

¹ Gen. xviii. 25.

² Gen. xviii. 21.

is thus graciously manifested to his servant, in much condescension. Abraham's mouth is stopped; and God is clear when He judgeth. The very messengers whom He sent, must add their personal testimony on the spot, to that awful cry, which the sin of Sodom had already uttered in the ear of the Lord of Hosts. Its citizens gloried in the shame of their tremendous iniquity; and a miracle from God, exerted to save the angels and Lot from their unnatural violence, failed to convince them. Sentence therefore is given against them, and must now be executed without delay. God had long awaited their repentance; and a few hours before had even invited the intercession of Abraham in their behalf. But there is a limit even to that mercy which flows in long-suffering, from the depths of God's compassion towards sinners: and if they will not only remain impenitent, but even challenge Him to do his worst, vengeance will at length come upon them to the uttermost. If they will tempt God to open the windows of heaven, and descend in indignation, they must die for ever, under the act of their daring and presumptuous folly; like that philosopher, who without due precaution, en-

deavoured to bring down lightning from the clouds, and perished in the experiment.

The sin of Sodom had reached unto heaven: the smoke of her guilt had gone up, as the smoke of a furnace, enkindled in the bottomless pit; and the smoke of her burning was now also to go up, for God had remembered her iniquities. When all was ready, and these sinners against their own souls had lulled themselves into perfect security,—when the sun was risen upon the earth,—that sun which they thought would light them to new scenes of profligate delight, “*the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah, brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven: and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and that which grew upon the ground.*”¹ They are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance, not only of temporal destruction, but of eternal fire,—not merely, as I imagine, to give the offending world a type of hell,—not merely to mark the wrath of God against iniquity obdurate committed, by exhibiting the standing wonder of the Dead Sea to be his witness, while the earth remains unconsumed,—but to

¹ Gen. xix. 24, 25.

shew the terrors of everlasting judgment, as denounced against them by the sentence of God. Our blessed Lord Himself has so represented their condition: and it is no proof of man's wisdom, whatever it may be of his morbid and perverted sensibility, that he should wish to be more merciful than God, even than God in Christ Jesus, who died to reconcile the world to Himself.

Conscience may now be steeped in sin, and drugged by indulgence into stupor and insensibility towards the judgment of the great day. But that judgment must come:—and, once passed, the gnawing of the worm that never dieth, the stings of an awakened conscience, forcing the soul to a dreadful remembrance of the past, infinite grace neglected, and the Redeemer's Atonement despised, the overflowing sense of present misery, with no pleasure to beguile the anguish, the hopelessness of the future, the absolute despair of the place of woe, which language may not tell, nor imagination paint, will form a dreadful aggregate of misery. “*Consider this, ye that forget God, lest He pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you.*”¹ If in a sleepless night, any im-

¹ Psalm l. 22.

penitent provoker of heaven's wrath, counts the hours, and every minute appears tedious, from a mere undefinable sense of weariness, then what will he do, when his obdurate transgression shall make him food for the worm that never dieth, and fuel for the fire that never shall be quenched? "*Who shall dwell with the devouring fire? who shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?*"¹

But while the Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished, He knoweth also how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to snatch them from dangers, into which their own covetousness, or other carnal and worldly motives have led them. And when they would assuredly perish in the general sin, if He did not interfere to restore and save them, in the undeserved exercise of his own faithfulness of mercy towards them. While Jehovah "*turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemning them with an overthrow, and making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly, He delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: for that right-*

¹ Isaiah xxxiii. 14.

*teous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous soul, from day to day, with their unlawful deeds."*¹ The well-watered plain of Sodom, fruitful as the garden of the Lord, had enticed him into these dwellings of unbridled iniquity: but while he stood aloof from sharing in the surrounding guilt, he was remembered of God, and perished not in the iniquities of the city. Judgment, though pronounced could not be executed, until he was past the accursed boundary. When the assurance of coming vengeance was revealed to him, "*he went out and spake unto his sons in law which married his daughters, and said, Up, get ye out of this place: for the Lord will destroy this city.*" But the love which yearned over them, and wrestled with them for their lives, strove in vain. "*He seemed as one that mocked to his sons-in-law.*"² Surely the testimony which holy relatives, and pleading ambassadors for Christ will be called to render before the throne of judgment, against those who meet their cry to flee from the wrath to come, with contempt and scorn, must be one of awful import. If, when they proclaim judg-

¹ 2 Peter ii. 6—8.² Gen. xix. 4.

ment and mercy, the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience, and the blood of the Lamb of God, which cleanseth from all sin, their message of love be regarded as only a cunningly-devised fable, what must be the issue?

If, however, they cannot be instrumental in saving others, the word of God calls to them with infinite urgency of mercy, to save themselves: as when the morning dawned, the angels hastened Lot, saying, "*Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.*"¹ And then it would appear, that an especial call from the great Redeemer of man Himself, is made to Lot, not to remain a moment near to this doomed and devoted city, but to flee to his appointed refuge: "*Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*"² It is not enough, that one whom infinite love hath taken

¹ Gen. xix. 15, 16.

² Gen. xix. 17.

as by the hand, should be content to escape, and only *just* to escape, the wrath of God! He should flee beyond the manifestly accursed boundaries of sin, and not stop short of the fulness of salvation in the Rock of ages, nor linger near the scenes of former guilt and unbelief. "*Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth towards those things that are before, he must press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*"¹ The engagements of God towards his servants, impose upon Him a gracious necessity of love, to secure their preservation. When Lot was accepted for Zoar, the Lord said unto him, "*Haste thee, escape thither : for I cannot do any thing until thou be come thither.*"² His holy word, the record of goodness already experienced by his saints, and of goodness to be fulfilled in all its length, and breadth, and depth, and height of mercy, to those who shall yet believe on Him to life everlasting, abounds with similar instances. The command is given to all who sojourn in the spiritual Sodom, against which wrath must go forth to the uttermost, "*Come out of her, my*

¹ Phil. iii. 13, 14.

² Gen. xix. 22.

people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues :”¹ and they have the assurances of deliverance to encourage them, in fleeing to the ark and mountain of salvation, in the Lamb of God. It is commanded to the fifth angel, when he has commission to sound his trumpet, that no hurt should be done, except to those men which have not the mark of God on their foreheads. And when the glory of the God of Israel, came to the man with the writer’s inkhorn by his side, He said unto him, “ *Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.*” And to others—to those in whose hands He had put the slaughter weapon of judgment, He said, “ *Go ye after him (whose office was to seal the holy mourners for impregnable safety,) through the city, and smite : let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity : slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women ; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark.*”² The destruction of the wicked is linked to the eternal

¹ Rev. xviii. 4.

² Ezek. ix. 4—6.

salvation of the righteous, and the Son of Man is the Dispenser of both. But ye whom the God of mercy has vouchsafed to own as his just and righteous ones, in the holy and consistent walk of faith, suffer me to plead with you, to make no sojourn in the tents of any known or suspected iniquity—to linger there, no, not a moment; even though in the hope that you may lead others out with you. Escape for your lives. Beseech, and intreat, that those whom you love would follow you; but plead and pray, with your loins girded, and your staff in your hand, and yourselves in haste to be gone; nay, already set forth upon your steadfast and eager way from the city. And as you flee along, (just as the chosen of Israel drank of the river through which they passed in pursuit of Midian, without stopping to rest in their progress,) cry earnestly, “Come out from among them and be ye separate without delay, else will you suffer loss indeed. If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the sinner and the ungodly appear? If these things are done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? Flee at once to the cross; and you will be made more than conquerors through Him who loved you.”

Lot was delivered ; but it was with the utter loss of all that had led him to choose the fertile plain of Sodom. Flocks, herds, and friends, died in the destruction of the city. If, as many have imagined, Lot had two daughters, not merely betrothed but actually married, they died with their unbelieving husbands, who took his earnest call for pleasantries, and God's awful voice, uttered by him, as a jest ; for two unmarried ones only followed him to Zoar. Here was a sad and fearful breach in the patriarch's family, to testify against the marriage of believers with unbelievers. Here was a woe fallen upon him, where he was most vulnerable ; and, when launched from this bow, Christian parents deeply feel the arrows of the Almighty in their hearts. O strive, ye, with whom it may be thus, to pluck these wanderers, as brands from the burning. Like an eminent saint of God, himself a father, charge your children to flee from their iniquities, to salvation in the Son of God, and bid them beware, that they meet you not, at the great tribunal, in sin and unbelief." ¹

And ye who appear to have left the city of

¹ Robert Bolton, see his Life, prefixed to his " Four Last Things."

your former transgressions,—ye whom some conviction of sin have led to fear lest you should be consumed, look not behind you. Take an everlasting leave of iniquity. Institute an immediate divorce of every thought and every affection of your hearts from that state, wherein the call of God's ministers has found you. Remember Lot's wife. She walked not steadfastly, and side by side with her husband and her children. If all her daughters were with her, yet was her heart bent upon the substance, and wealth, and friends left behind. If two daughters had perished in the general ruin, she was perhaps bewailing them. It is plain, at least, that her heart was still in Sodom: she looked back in desire, as did the mixed multitude afterwards from the camp of God in the wilderness; and she became a pillar of salt,—a monument of the wrath of heaven, against a hollow-hearted profession of religion. “*He that putteth his hand to the plough, and looketh back, is unfit for the kingdom of God.*”¹ Had she remained near her husband, had she leaned on his hand, and listened to his counsels, she might and would have been saved. But she

¹ Luke ix. 62.

looked from behind him, she lingered, and she died. Never follow the Head and Captain of your salvation afar off; never halt behind those who are following the Lord fully, if you are earnest in professing to seek the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. Strive to keep up with those who are foremost in the blessed way. Gird up the loins of your minds: be diligent, zealous, and unwearied in the might of the Holy Spirit: and "*so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*"¹

And ye who sin against God, and all his goodness, and not least his long-suffering, with a high and daring hand, think not that ye shall be safe from the hour of his wrath, if ye continue to neglect and mock the hour of his mercy. Think not that ye shall escape the coming woe. "*It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you.*"² If ye will declare your sin, as Sodom, and publish it at Gomorrah,—if ye will contemn the messengers of life and mercy, ye are not far from the day when the Judge shall appear

¹ 2 Peter i. 11.

² Luke x. 12.

against you. "*He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*"¹

II. But while Sodom and all its guilty indwellers thus perished in the gainsaying of their sins, WHAT WAS THE CONDUCT OF ABRAHAM? He had interceded for the city,—wrestled with God earnestly on its behalf; and had he dared to hold fast by God for another supplication, would have prevailed for its deliverance. His example, the parables of our Lord, the new and living Way into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, the mercy-seat sprinkled with that blood, and all the ready help of the throne of grace, whither the Father invites those who have learned, and who love to pray, all unite to bid them to be importunate—to pray and not to faint; and especially not to faint in intercessory supplication for friends yet without the fold of salvation, and for the land wherein they dwell. While many around you, who might have communion with God, and the interest of a gracious unity with the Great Intercessor, are thoughtless and impenitent, will ye not pour out your hearts

¹ Prov. xxix. 1.

unto your heavenly Father, in their behalf, that so Israel may be a blessing in the land of Assyria?

Abram's heart was deeply affected towards Sodom; and he dreaded its ruin. He gat up therefore early in the morning to the place where, the preceding day, he had stood before the Lord, probably to renew his supplication, if yet there were hope: *and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and beheld, and lo the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.*"¹ His intercession therefore failed, as to the full extent of its object: but it failed not, in one dear and especial part of his desire. "*It came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.*"² Bless God for this encouragement, if any of you are bearing impenitent relations upon your hearts before Him. Pray in fervency, and pray in faith. Put God in remembrance concerning them—pray for them, as the woman of Canaan clung to her Redeemer in behalf of

¹ Gen. xix. 28.

² Gen. xix. 29.

her afflicted daughter; and hope for her answer, "*Great is thy faith; be it unto thee, even as thou wilt.*"¹

The smoke of ruined Sodom was Abraham's pillar of fire and of cloud, to direct his steps from a place, where he perhaps thought all was lost, and Lot himself consumed in the conflagration. "*He journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.*"² Another instance, and one that saddened his heart indeed, was thus given him, that he had no resting place, but must strike his tent, and journey onward. And surely the providences of God that daily meet our eyes, and his not unfrequent present and visible judgments, against guilty lands and guilty souls, should teach those whom the light of heavenly wisdom hath reached, that here they have no continuing city: and induce them, with increasing diligence, increasing watchfulness, increasing fervour of prayer, and increasing singleness of eye in looking unto Jesus, to seek that city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.

¹ Matt. xv. 28.

² Gen. xx. 1.

II. A very few words must suffice concerning

THE SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF LOT.

It is a dark and dreadful page in the volume, that testifies with such perfect truth both of God and man. It was his sin, that he shrunk away from the divine command, to flee at once to the mountain. It was his sin to ask leave to go and dwell in Zoar, either as a little city, and therefore less guilty, as to its mass of sinfulness than others, or because he thought the request thus made to be a little one, which might be easily granted. Alas, nothing is little —no consequences are trifling which flow from opposition to the plain commands of God! He may accept us concerning the perverse desire of our hearts, and visit us with the rod and anguish of chastisement in that acceptance. Our short-sighted desire of avoiding the cross may be granted; and we may thereby fall into sin, from which we should otherwise have escaped. Once however in Zoar, Lot ought to have remained there. But now, dreading lest the fire should descend upon it, or dreading lest its inhabitants might slay him; or wishing, it may be, to find out Abraham, he went to dwell in the mountain, and his daughters with him.

There, he who had remained uncontaminated amidst all the sins, all the temptations, all the rebellions of Sodom, fell into a most guilty and God-dishonouring transgression. These things were written for our example, upon whom the ends of the world are come. “*Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*”¹ Concerning the circumstances which led the daughters of Lot to the monstrous act whereby they and their father sinned, and that so foully, much has been written. To my own view, their conjecture, as Bishop Patrick well observes, is the most probable, who conceive, that the eager desire which then possessed the hearts of those who believed in God at all, to obtain the promise of the Messiah, put them upon the perpetration of this awful iniquity. They had lived chastely amidst the iniquities of Sodom; and surely it is hard to imagine that a spirit of such tremendous uncleanness entered them as in a moment. They joined each other in this contrivance, contrary to that concealment, which all sins of uncleanness eagerly desire; thus testifying that they acted by counsel and design, and not merely by

¹ 1 Cor. x. 12.

the baseness of passion and appetite. They perpetuated the memory of this awful deed in the names of their children: and therefore appear rather to have gloried in it, than shrunk from the dread of discovery. The promise of Messiah was confined to the line of Shem, as they doubtless knew; and thinking their father alone left alive in all that descent, they made him a partner in their crime and guilt. O what is man, when human wisdom, (foolishness as it is with God,) takes the helm, and God leaves the pilot to himself!

But then how fallen is just and righteous Lot! Had any one looked him in the face, and testified in the midst of Sodom, that thus it would be, his righteous soul would indeed have been vexed, and he would have cried out in language like to that of Hazael in an after day, "*But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?*"¹ Many strong men hath wine beaten down, and bound in the chains of Satan; yea, men who once were strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; and whose recovery has been through anguish and shame unspeakable. Wine makes Lot forget

¹ 2 Kings viii. 13.

that he is a father, forget that his wife is dead, that only his daughters are near him. God and nature are forgotten and outraged; and that sin is committed, at which heaven and earth are ashamed; and which to this day stands an indelible record in the Scriptures, against this righteous man. Brethren, I beseech you most affectionately, and most tenderly, to set a watch upon yourselves, and avoid this sin. So far is drunkenness from being an excuse for sin, that as a moral writer has well observed,¹ you must multiply the guilt of drunkenness by the guilt of the outrages which it may tempt a man to commit; and then you have the product of the whole iniquity.

We hear no more of Lot. His sun goes down in a dark and dismal cloud. The children thus born become heads of nations, who persecute the heritage of God: and here is confusion and every evil work. Ye then, whom unsearchable mercy had led into the fold of salvation—ye who “*are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God,*”² and whom a Saviour’s tenderness in providence and grace hath led,

¹ Dr. Paley.

² 1 Cor. vi. 11.

even to hoary hairs, stand on your watch, with the utmost caution, that you may not dishonour God, in your last moments; but may bear testimony to the riches of his grace, the blessedness of his service, and the holiness of his salvation, until Christ shall bear you witness upon a dying bed of spiritual peace; and ultimately before assembled worlds, in the great day of his appearing. Take example, not only from the failure of Lot, of giving Satan any advantage over you, and of causing the enemies of God to blaspheme, through your sin; but also from the example of Abraham, the friend of God Himself. He dwelt in Gerar, and there, even (as we may believe), while he must have known that Sarah was about to bear the child of promise, sinned with Abimelech by distrust of God, after the similitude of his former transgression with Pharaoh in Egypt. I do not place it again before you; for it has been already noticed, and brought, as I would willingly believe, to be seen in the light of Scriptural truth. God's word and promises are pillars of immoveable faithfulness; rest upon them in every difficulty, and they cannot fail you. The cowardly dependence which so many place on their own miserable policies and expe-

diencies, equally dishonours God, and injures themselves. “ *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart ; and lean not to thine own understanding : in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.*”

¹ Prov. iii. 5, 6.

SERMON XXV.

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC.

GENESIS XXI. 1, 3.

AND THE LORD VISITED SARAH, AS HE HAD SAID, AND THE LORD DID UNTO SARAH AS HE HAD SPOKEN. FOR SARAH CONCEIVED, AND BARE ABRAHAM A SON IN HIS OLD AGE, AT THE SET TIME OF WHICH GOD HAD SPOKEN TO HIM. AND ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF HIS SON THAT WAS BORN UNTO HIM, WHOM SARAH BARE TO HIM, ISAAC.

WHEN our Redeemer stood before the grave of Lazarus, about to call his friend from the dead, and bade some of the bystanders roll away the stone, Martha said unto Him concerning her departed brother, "*Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he has been dead four days.*" Jesus rebuked the rising infidelity of her heart, and cried, "*Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?*"¹ And immediately her

¹ John xi. 39, 40.

brother was bidden to come forth from his grave, and live. The time during which the unsearchable wisdom of God may see fit to exercise the faith of his believing servants, upon any especial point of his promise, and their desire, may appear to be long, as it will be trying, but the end will be a full accomplishment. “*The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.*”¹ The patient expectation of a Christian never yet failed of its gracious reward, in all the good things which the Lord his God spake concerning him. It was thus with Abraham. He had need of patience; that after he had done the will of God, he might receive the promise: and now the Most High amply, and effectually redeemed the word of unchangeable truth to his servant and friend. The history therefore attests

THE HAPPY ISSUE OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

Throughout the whole process of divine dealing towards him, it was equally his duty and privilege, like his favoured descendants on the

¹ Hab. ii. 3.

banks of the Red Sea to stand still and see the salvation of God. Every thing was calculated to impress upon his heart that lesson of impotence on the part of man, and Omnipotence on the part of God, which at once attests an absolute need of divine assistance, and an unfailing refuge in the assurance, "*Not by might, nor by power; but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.*"

(1) *The mercy promised, was such as Abraham never could have expected to realize.*

When the word of the Lord came unto him in a vision, saying, "*Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward,*" he said, "*Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless.*"² And when after the birth of Ishmael, a son by Sarah was promised to him, some distrust seemed to have mingled itself with the power of a high and holy faith in his mind, at the improbable greatness of the promise, and he said unto God, "*O that Ishmael might live before Thee!*"³ as though he would have been contented with less than Jehovah undertook to grant; and remain satisfied with a prospect that the world's Deliverer and his

¹ Zech. iv. 6.

² Gen. xv. 1, 2.

³ Gen. xvi. 13.

own Saviour should spring from the son of the bondwoman. And is there not here something closely analogous to the experience of the life of faith, in every Christian? How often, and how long are they whom the Holy Ghost has convinced of sin, whom the Law has terrified, whom the anticipations of judgment have awakened, and to whom the Saviour's infinite grace and love are preached, hindered from finding rest to their souls in Him, by an overwhelming sense of the greatness of the very mercy for which they are panting! Thus, the abundance of that provision which God undertook to spread before his people in the wilderness staggered the faith of Moses. He said, "*The people among whom I am are six hundred thousand footmen; and Thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together to suffice them?*" "*And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shall see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.*"¹ If any of you are thus hindered from resting

¹ Num. xi. 21, 23.

upon the stupendous salvation of Jesus Christ, allow me to protest against this mistaken humility, which keeps you at a distance from the very blessings which yet you feel you must obtain, like Rachel's children, or else you die. The offer of the mercy is as full and free, as the mercy itself is inestimable. It was a revelation of goodness misunderstood by Manoah when he said to his wife, "*We shall surely die, because we have seen God.*"¹ Hath He promised—hath He freely laid before you, who hunger and thirst for salvation, its depths of love in his Son; and doth the Spirit invite you by the Scripture, to come and drink of the water of life freely? Take God at his word. Kiss the outstretched sceptre of his love. Plead his own offer; and cry to Him, "*So do as Thou hast said.*"² Let not the brightness of the Sun of Righteousness blind the eye of your faith, when it was intended to strengthen it. Let not the sound of mercy in the gospel, overwhelm your sense of spiritual hearing. What God in his Son thinks not too great to give, that do not ye dishonour his love, by thinking too great to receive. Come behind the Saviour in all the

¹ Judges xiii. 22.

² 2 Sam. vii. 23.

fulness of his glorious power to bless you. If your feeble faith can do no more, yet touch the hem of his garment; and you shall be made whole. His thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor his ways as your ways. "*O ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt?*"¹ Lift up your hearts, each in its fervent aspiration for the rich blessing of an ability to repose on the faithfulness of God. "*Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief:*"² and you shall not expect, nor ask in vain.

(2) *While the mercy itself was great, the difficulties in the way of its accomplishment were, to the eye of Abraham's sense, insurmountable.* He was called upon, even against hope, to believe in hope, that he might be the father of many nations—of Jews according to the flesh, of Jews and Gentiles according to the faith of Jesus Christ. If he considered his own body, now dead, as to its agency towards the hope which God had set before him, that hope could only have been the mockery of his desire, since he was now an hundred years old. If he considered the deadness of Sarah's womb, where was the human possibility that his posterity by

¹ Matt. xiv. 31.

² Mark ix. 24.

SERMON XXV.

er should be as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable? What then was Abraham's resource? Just that to which every one who is partaker of like precious faith must betake himself, in the sense of his own destitution. He considered not the deadness of his own body, nor that of Sarah's womb. He looked far beyond them both. He believed God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not, as though they were: who called him a father, and Sarah a mother, when sense pronounced it to be impossible. Therefore it was that he staggered not through unbelief; but was strong in faith giving glory to God. His difficulties served only to place him, where faith has its best and its only proper exercise, as a helper but patiently expecting believer, in the arms of an infallible promise. To rest upon the almighty sufficiency of God for the accomplishment of that which is impossible to aught beside, faith indeed. It is that grace, at which the infidel may mock, and whereof he may make his scorn; but which is the soul's only wisdom, peace, and true repose.

It is also faith's best office to fix itself peculiarly on that revelation made by God

Himself, which is immediately accommodated to the difficulties wherewith it is surrounded. Is Abraham to believe that from his dead body a multitude of nations must proceed? What then is his refuge? Even to rest on God who quickeneth the dead. Carry this directory (at once the most simple and efficacious, that even the word of God itself can give) into all the circumstances of your Christian life, as God hath quickened you from the death of trespasses and sins, and raised you up, together with Christ, in the living membership of his body. Do you mourn over the guilt and pollution of your iniquities? "*The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin.*"¹ Do you ask help, in utter inability to fulfil the law? "*He is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*"² Doth conscious sin appear to separate you from the throne of grace, and make you doubt of acceptance there? "*If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.*"³ He is able, in virtue of his unchangeable priesthood, to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him. There is a leaf of the Tree of Life

¹ 1 John i. 7.² Rom. x. 4.³ 1 John ii. 1.

for the healing of every malady: and like those of the Cedars of Lebanon, its branches grow so near the ground, that the shortest and feeblest of the children of God may pluck from them, and apply the leaves with the hand of faith to all their spiritual maladies and necessities.

In human undertakings there may be a want of sincerity in the promiser or a want of power to fulfil his engagements; or else an absolute forgetfulness to make good his own declarations; as Pharaoh's butler forgot his word to Joseph. But in Christ Jesus all the promises of God are yea and amen to his glory; and He cannot deny Himself. No limit can be placed in the way of his Almightyness; no voice can come forth even from the greatest and apparently the most insuperable difficulties in the way of fulfilment to his word, and say unto Him, "*Hitherto shalt thou go and no further.*"¹ It is a sound and noble principle of our English constitutional law, that no lapse of time however great, nothing in fact short of absolute impossibility, can prevent the sovereign from recovering the debts and obligations due to his crown; nor diminish his power to vindicate the

¹ Job xxxviii. 11.

honour of his sovereignty, nor yet his right to avenge the wrong that may be committed against his dignity. He is supposed to be always occupied for the public good; and therefore may not have leisure to assert his right, within the time limited to subjects. It is the same in the government of God. No time can deprive Him of the ability to make good his engagements. No lapse of years can deliver the subject creation, and every part of it from its liability to his Almighty government. The period of human expectancy may have passed, and hope may have subsided into despondency. But with God all things are possible: and his promise may be fulfilled at that very moment when despondency began to take the place of hope: and at evening time the horizon of promise long delayed, may be light. Zion's feeble faith may tempt her to say, "*The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me* :¹" but it is mere infirmity, charging its own defect upon Jehovah in his engagements for the salvation of all who trust Him. That doubter's mind is like the eye of one who looks up at the heavens, and thinks the whole firma-

¹ Isa. xlix. 14.

ment, with all its suns and stars in motion, while that imagined motion is in reality only the revolution of the little planet whereon he stands. "*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea she may forget, yet will not I forget thee.*"¹ When God therefore calls you to believe on Him, and to wait in faith the time of his appointment, remember that He is glorified if patience has her perfect work. Do not consult with flesh and blood. Do not ponder the difficulties, but rest upon the promise: and thus will you who believe be strong in faith, giving glory to God. "*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*"²

(3) *Abraham's experience was a proof that the promises of God, as the God of truth, are assurances, than which nothing more is needed,—that he who believes them shall undoubtedly enjoy them.* The righteousness of God in them is revealed from faith to faith—from the faith, or faithfulness of God declaring, to the faith or confidence of man receiving. With Him there is no variableness neither shadow of turning.

¹ Isa. xlix. 15.

² Mark ix. 23.

The Surety of those promises is an unchangeable Mediator Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Though we believe not, yet He continueth faithful: He cannot deny Himself. The gospel is glad tidings of great joy, even to the chief of sinners. All its provisions of mercy rest upon the truth of God. We know that the condition, the only condition upon which the engagements of compassion to a perishing world are based—even the blood-shedding of the one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, hath been fulfilled. The proclamation hath gone forth—a sound of common mercy—“*Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*”¹ The truth of God the Father, the truth and work, the sayings and the sufferings of God the Son, in our nature—and the faithfulness of God the Holy Ghost, are a three-fold cord that cannot be broken, on which the most trembling Christian is encouraged to suspend all his hopes and all the momentous interests of his soul. And if you

¹ Isa. i. 18.

are seeking salvation by the gracious process of their appointment, will you thrust away your own comfort, and lay a suicidal hand upon the life of your own hope by unbelief? If a general proclamation of pardon be made to the guilty—and if not one name hath been revealed as excluded—if the Saviour cries, "*Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest*"¹—and if in this universal amnesty of redeeming love there be no bill of individual exception, why will ye write bitter things against yourselves, and think that what is designedly published for all, was never meant to extend individually to you? Believe, ye who are anxiously looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, that He is dealing with you in the simplicity of his truth: and so shall you enter into rest: so shall you cry, "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*"²

If the servants of Benhadad eagerly watched the lips of Ahab, to gather up any expression

¹ Matt. xi. 28.

² Psalm xlii. 11.

of friendliness, however equivocal, that might fall from him towards their master in his helplessness and misery, and brought Benhadad before the king of Israel, upon the poor encouragement—"He is my brother;" why should any one, conscious of his need, and yearning for deliverance from the peril wherein he is placed, hesitate to close with all the offers of mercy, poured upon him, so to speak, for the very purpose of overwhelming all unbelief: as the waters of the deluge descended from the opened windows of heaven, and the broken up fountains of the great deep, to destroy the guilty world? While the trumpet of that liberty wherewith Christ alone makes free from the thralldom of sin, utters its breath of mercy, so long and loudly, why should the poor bondslave hesitate to rise up and claim the gracious freedom whereto he is thus called? . When the gates of the city of refuge are thrown widely open upon the hinges of infinite and everlasting love, and there is a voice from the walls encouraging the manslayer to draw nigh, why should he hesitate without, and await the coming moment, when the avenger of blood shall overtake him? While mercy is so ready to receive all comers, surely they who, trusting to it with

the greatest confidence, flee towards it with the readiest speed of their hearts' motion, shall have the fullest and the dearest welcome; for they most truly honour God in the salvation of his own appointment. While the minister of the Church prays you in Christ's stead, "Be ye reconciled to God;" as though Christ Himself did beseech you, rest on that double line of fortification to your hope, which ready love, and this amazing condescension unite to form; and be strong in faith, giving glory to God, in closing, heart and soul, with the message of his mercy.

It may be long before you enter into all the power and sweetness of the promises, in the full assurance of faith: for the Canaanite of unbelief may be put forth before you, only by little and little. But if it be thus, you must learn, with Abraham, to glorify the truth and power of God, in the twilight, or even in the darkness of expectancy: his *truth*, like Abraham, in the set time, which He hath reserved in the secrecies of his own appointment; and his *power*, like the patriarch also, in overlooking the age and deadness of himself and his wife. He has given you his Son already, as the hostage of his truth: and in the faith which He will

bestow upon you He will give you the hostage of his Spirit, for the full accomplishment of that salvation, whereunto the youngest and feeblest among the children of God is called, according to his Father's purpose and grace.

A little while before the day arrived when the father of the faithful was to be blessed with the child of promise, that promise, with all the magnificent prospect of blessing included in him, was more decidedly revealed, and the appointed season declared. And as they who believe the engagements of God are blessed, because there shall be an accomplishment of those things which were spoken, so will it often happen in the experience of such faithful ones, that new and more vivid communications of divine love, new and plainer sealings of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts—new and dearer earnestness of the purchased possession shall be brought to them by the hand of the Spirit, to tell them not only of the plenty, but of the nearness of the promised land, and to uphold them during the few remaining marches that may yet lie between them, and the new wine, and the new corn of the Canaan that lies beyond the wilderness and the river.

Thus upheld, Abraham's faith triumphed

over all the opposing and embarrassing suggestions of sight and sense. "*He staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.*"¹ And therefore, not only was his faith counted unto him for righteousness, in the forgiveness of sins, through the promised Saviour, but, with reference to the promised seed, it was at once exchanged for vision. Jehovah, who cannot lie, visited Sarah as He said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bare Abraham a son, at the set time, of which God had spoken to him.

It is not uncommon in Christian experience, that believers against hope, believing in hope, look for the promises of mercy towards them, with the fretfulness of Sisera's mother, rather than the repose of Abraham, saying, "*Why is his chariot so long in coming, and why tarry the wheels of his chariot?*" I would affectionately beseech such characters, feeble, though sincere in faith, to go forward in the way of passive acquiescence, and holy duty; for the Lord their God will, ere long, make their darkness to be light. Yet a little while, and

¹ Rom. vi. 26.

He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry, and when He shall appear with Almighty power to accomplish all his undertakings, those tried and tempted ones, shall reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them. "Hold out," said a saint of God to the graces of his heart, which had been long in exercise, as the Almightyness of the Holy Ghost maintained their constancy, while greatly exercised,—“Hold out, faith and patience, a little longer, and then I shall need you no more for ever.”

It must however be remembered, that Sarah is the church's mother, no less than Abraham the father of all them that believe: and the happy issue which I have endeavoured to illustrate, was granted to *her* belief, not less than to that of her husband, stronger and more unswerving as it was. “*Through faith also, Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.*”¹ “Therefore, (that is of Sarah's, not less than Abraham's holy confidence,) *sprang*

¹ Heb. xi. 11.

there, even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude." At first she merely considered the promise, in connexion with her own circumstances; and then its utter improbability, according to the course of nature, struck upon her mind, and she laughed with incredulity. But when her mind, according to the true nature of faith, turned away from the promise, in connexion with herself, to its connexion with the Almighty Promiser, she knew that his power could remove all difficulties, and his experienced faithfulness would lead Him to do that whereof He had spoken. Her faith is held forth as the Church's example: and it testifies for the imitation of all the daughters of God, who partake the Church's privileges, duties, and responsibilities of wedded life; that they be followers of their believing husbands, and so be included in their blessings, and large dispensers of blessings to them. Rest, ye who look to be mothers in the spiritual Israel of the Church, upon the truth of God, while you plead before Him the children of promise whom He has engaged to give you. There you rest upon the Rock of ages. *Al*

difficulties, all seeming impossibilities in the way of that Faithful One who hath promised, will pass away, like the ebbing tide from the rock. Your soul shall magnify the Lord for his accomplished mercy; your spirit shall rejoice in God your Saviour.

Abraham called his son's name "*Isaac*," according to the divine command, linked as it was to the all gracious declaration, "*I will establish my covenant with him, even an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.*"¹ The son's name testified to the father's joy, and to the holy laughter of the father's heart. Thus every time he named his child, he gave witness to the goodness of God, and to the delight that springs from a sense of accomplished promises. Nay, more than this: Isaac's name enkindled the joy of a sure and certain hope in Abraham's soul, connected with that everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, made by God with the child of promise, not less firmly than with himself. Learn, ye to whom that covenant hath a preciousness beyond all price, to connect every mercy you receive with it, and write upon each, the name, "*Jehovah Shammah*," *the Lord is*

¹ Gen. xvi. 19.

there."¹ So will those mercies give you double delight, by joining them to your Saviour and Surety in the covenant. They will thus be enlarged, by being consecrated to the divine glory. And thus, while they who know no God, and see not his hand in what they possess, receive their good things, as a perishing portion, held only by the same tenure with the breath in their nostrils, and then to be succeeded by the wretchedness of an everlasting destitution, you will find every bestowment of your heavenly Father's hand a possession for your immediate comfort, and an earnest of your everlasting blessedness.

¹ Ezekiel xlviii. 35.

SERMON XXVI.

ARGUMENTS FOR INFANT BAPTISM.

(PART I.)

GENESIS XXI. 3, 4.

AND ABRAHAM CALLED THE NAME OF HIS SON THAT WAS BORN UNTO HIM, WHOM SARAH BARE TO HIM, ISAAC. AND ABRAHAM CIRCUMCISED HIS SON ISAAC, BEING EIGHT DAYS OLD, AS GOD HAD COMMANDED HIM.

“ A WOMAN when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come ; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.” Most eminently must this transition from the sad entail of the primitive judgment against sin, to delight and happiness, have been made good in the experience of Sarah. A barrenness long hopeless to the

¹ John xvi. 21.

apprehension of sense, and against which her faith was hardly able to plead the word of an unchangeable God, is removed by miracle : and at ninety years old she bears a son to Abraham. But if these newly-opened springs of natural love are dear and delightful to her mind, what must be the holy joy with which she views in the child of her old age, that promised seed wherein all the families of the earth were to be blessed, the progenitor of that glorious Redeemer, the seed of the woman, in whose all-prevailing Righteousness and Atonement, a lost world should find its peace, its life, and its salvation.

Being however by nature born in sin, and a child of wrath, by his natural heritage, the first and most solemn call upon the duties of parental love, is to make him, according to his father's faith, which looked forward to the Saviour's day with holy gladness, a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. The divine command had been given, that Isaac should be circumcised at eight days old. Abraham therefore, who had left his country, and his kindred, and his father's house at the bidding of God ; who, according to the same injunction, had received in his own body

the sign and seal of the righteousness which he had by faith, being yet uncircumcised, hesitated not to impress it upon his son, at eight days old, with a joyfulness to which a sense of the mercies wherein the child would be thus instated, gave birth within his heart.

Now the circumcision of Isaac bears immediately upon the subject of Christian Baptism. That subject is very momentous in its aspect upon the duty of parents under the Christian covenant, upon the spiritual welfare of their children, and upon the true prosperity of the Church of God. It is at the same time little understood, and therefore undervalued by those who professedly bring their infants to the baptismal font, for union and membership with Jesus Christ, which is the very important end of Baptism. I propose therefore to employ two or three discourses upon the connexion between Infant Circumcision and Infant Baptism, as a subject suitable to the period and circumstances of Abraham's life, at which we are now arrived. I commend them, with much solicitude, to your earnest attention and candid consideration, in dependence on the Spirit and blessing of Almighty God.

As members indeed of the Church of Eng-

land, and therefore assertors of the doctrines laid down in her articles, you acknowledge that "the Baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ."¹ The arguments, however, against a practice so natural and endearing to the spiritual love of a Christian parent, are so confidently urged; and the faith of many concerning it, is, I am afraid, so feeble, because their information is so scanty and deficient, that it becomes a duty to consider

THE SCRIPTURAL ORIGIN AND AUTHORITY
OF INFANT BAPTISM.

The connexion between it and circumcision, is at once obvious and important, and may therefore well be proposed as the foundation of the argument. Regarding then the father of the faithful as a parent, resting upon the sure promise of God, and Isaac as the child of promise, sealed by circumcision for the temporal and eternal fulfilment of every gracious engagement on the part of Jehovah, I propose to notice,

I. THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT, AS SUBSTANTIALLY THE

¹ Article XXVII.

SAME WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT OF SALVATION WHEREOF JESUS CHRIST IS THE SUM AND SURETY.

To speak of Abraham, only as the natural progenitor of the Jewish people; and of the covenant made with him, as bearing only upon the national polity of that race, regarded as a civil community, whereof God was the chief, is utterly to confound the distinction between a Church, purely so considered, and a commonwealth. Abraham was himself a believer in the promises of God, for his own salvation, and for the salvation of man in Jesus Christ. His faith was accounted to him for righteousness. But he was also the father of the faithful. As such, the covenant of redemption was made with him in Christ, and with all believers, as his spiritual seed, and that upon the same ground—their faith in God. “*He received the sign of circumcision,—a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also. And the father of circumcision, to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father*

*Abraham, which he had, being yet uncircumcised."*¹ When therefore the infallible testimony of the Holy Ghost was given, that his faith was imputed to him for righteousness, "*it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him: but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him, that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.*"² And therefore the tide of gladness hath flowed eastward, and westward, and northward, and southward, to Jew and Gentile, to Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, in that Scripture, "*If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*"³

We then, (equally with him who stands before the Church of Christ, marked with the creature's noblest distinction, as the friend of God,) "*are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*"⁴ "*It is one God, who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.*"⁵

The original of the Jewish Church therefore, is to be referred, in its spiritual constitution to Abraham, as the father of the faithful: while

¹ Rom. iv. 11, 12.

² Ibid. iv. 23—24.

³ Gal. iii. 29.

⁴ Phil. iii. 3.

⁵ Rom. iii. 30.

as a Church under political regulations, it must be referred to Moses, the great legislator of God's ancient people. And this distinction is plainly made by that great master of divine philosophy, St. Paul; "*This I say, that the covenant which was before confirmed of God (with Abraham) in Christ, the Law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise (to Abraham) of none effect.*"¹ A plain and positive distinction is here drawn, between the covenant made by God with Abraham, and his seed, when He called him out of the world, and that political engagement made afterwards with the Jews, when the Law was given to them, amidst the thunderings, and lightnings, and voices, of the burning mount. The promise that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham and his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."²

The Abrahamic covenant then, was in substance, that of evangelical grace and mercy, afterwards perfectly fulfilled, in the person, mission, and salvation of the Lamb of God,—of that great mystery of godliness, God mani-

¹ Gal. iii. 17.

² Rom. iv. 13.

fest in the flesh, who as to his humanity took upon Him the nature, and was born of the seed of Abraham. Being therefore Himself circumcised, Christ was called a minister of the circumcision, to confirm the truth of the promises made to the fathers.¹ "*The promise is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end that it might be sure to all the seed: not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all*"² who truly believe in Jesus. Not then because the Israelites are the natural seed of Abraham, are they all spiritual children; "*but in Isaac shall thy seed be called:*" that is, "*they which are children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*"³ This covenant, therefore, while the law was added because of transgressions, was to endure till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made,⁴ that is, until the Eternal Word should become incarnate, of the seed of the woman, should open a fountain of absolute and eternal cleansing for sin and for uncleanness, in the laver of his blood.

¹ Rom. xv. 8.² Rom. ix. 7, 8.³ Rom. iv. 16.⁴ Gal. iii. 17.

The evangelical character of this covenant, and its application, not to the natural but to the spiritual posterity of Abraham, appear also from its *initiatory sacrament—the rite of circumcision*, which God calls the sign of the covenant between Himself and the believing race of that much honoured patriarch.¹ Hence the covenant, whereof this painful process was a token, is called by St. Stephen the covenant of circumcision; while that circumcision itself is called by St. Paul, the seal of the righteousness of faith. Elsewhere it is made “the outward visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace,” even the circumcision of the heart.² And agreeably to this spiritual signification, the great Apostle speaks of it. “*He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh : but he is a Jew which is one inwardly ; and circumcision is of the heart ; in the spirit and not in the letter ; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*”³

This covenant, then, embracing that great multitude of believers whom no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, collected in one blessed member-

¹ Gen. xvii. 11.

² Deut. x. 16 ; xxx. 6.

³ Rom. ii. 28, 29.

ship with Him who purchased the Church with his own blood, is really in its essence and character, that which is more fully promulged in the everlasting gospel of the grace of God. It consequently respects ourselves, to whom in these last days, God has spoken by his Son. I observe then secondly, that

II. INFANTS WERE CAPABLE OF PARTAKING ITS SIGN AND SEAL—CIRCUMCISION.¹ Were capable did I say? they were expressly commanded, and that under pain of a spiritual forfeiture the most tremendous, to receive it. *"This is my covenant, which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee; every male child among you shall be circumcised. He that is eight days old, or as it is in the original—a son of eight days shall be circumcised among you; every man child in your genera-*

¹ The two Sacraments of the Old Testament, which were more particularly copied in the New, are anterior to the Jewish Law. Circumcision, the preluder of Baptism, was not of Moses, but of the fathers. John vi. 22. Rom. iv. 11, 12. Gal. iii. 12. So also the Passover, the preluder to the Lord's Supper, was instituted before the Law was given. As these ordinances therefore were anterior to the types and shadows of the Levitical dispensation, they might substantially remain, when those shadows had vanished away, although their form should be changed, to make them more suitable to this last and best dispensation of mercy to mankind.

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*he that is born in the house, or bought money of any stranger, that is not of thy and my covenant shall be in your flesh for everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from the people; he hath broken my covenant."*¹ The passage was therefore, of universal application. It binding upon all who became members of the Church of the living God, which is formed of the seed of Abraham, not in his natural, but in his religious relation and capacity, as well as a believer, and the spiritual father of them that believe. There is in fact no proof that God ever had a Church upon earth, where-

Gen. xvii. 10—13. So jealous were the Jews not to pass before the eighth day before they circumcised their children, that they delayed this rite on the Sabbath-day, if the exact time made it inconvenient (John vii. 22, 23.) The eighth day seems to have been chosen because creatures newly born were during seven days supposed to be unclean, and in their blood: but on the eighth day, they might be offered unto the Lord. (Lev. xxi. 27.) And so of the Levites, (Lev. xii. 2, 3.) The same number of days was observed in many other things; as for the consecration of the priests, (Lev. viii. 33, 35, and ix. 1.); the cleansing of lepers, (Lev. xiv. 8—10); and of persons with unclean issues, (Lev. xv. 14); the purifying of polluted Nazarites, (Numb. vi. 18); and for purifying the altar, (Ezek. xlvi. 26, 27.) See also Bishop Babington's "Comfortable Notes on Genesis." p. 67.

of infants were not members. The covenant with Abraham, being also with his infant seed, was to be sealed to them by the ordinance of that God who made it with them, in the gracious riches of his free salvation. The females were represented in the males, as in other cases, the head stood for the whole family. (1 Cor. xi. 3.) Religious blessings, religious privileges, religious obligations, are exclusively of neither sex; but equally the right of both, in the one God and Father of both, by the one Mediator Christ Jesus. "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*"¹ And when circumcision had been duly ministered, faith might plead the unspeakably great and precious promises of God.

Circumcision then was an ordinance of latitude, embracing all ages, and all conditions of men—Jews and Gentiles.² The first case of adult circumcision indeed, was not a matter of choice, but of necessity; for Abraham was ninety and nine years old when the seal was stamped upon his flesh, and the blessings of

¹ Gal. iii. 28.

² See Gen. xvii. 12, and Ainsworth on the Pentateuch, p. 57.

redemption by the Word made flesh, so secured to him. But as all his household, from the eldest to Ishmael underwent it,¹ as all who

¹ Circumcision concerned not the children of Israel only, but the whole seed of Abraham: for those children of his by his concubines, that lived in Arabia, as Ishmaelites, Dedanites, Medamites, Midianites, &c. were circumcised, as well as Israel in Palestine. The countries whither he sent them were once in the possession of the Canaanites, until he obtained them by the conquest of the four kings, and thither he sent them with the seal of circumcision upon them, which gave them interest in the land there, as well as Isaac had elsewhere. Circumcision therefore, served, not for the distinction of Israel from other nations, but of the seed of Abraham from all other people.—*Lightfoot*. IV. 276. Circumcision was to Abraham and his seed, the seal of the promise of Canaan. “I will give to thee and to thy seed all the land of Canaan; therefore thou and thy seed after thee shall keep my covenant.” Hence, in after times, Joshua, when the people had entered the land, was commanded to circumcise them. Canaan it will be remembered was a type of the Gospel state, and of the rest that remaineth for the people of God. Adam, Enoch, Noah, &c. were not circumcised, because to them a fixed and settled residence for the Church was not designed; but when one was intended for Abraham, then circumcision was given also. *Lightfoot*, IV. 275.

“Circumcision, the initiatory seal of admission within the Jewish Church, must be considered the fundamental rite of Judaism. Mahometanism appears to have first raised the custom of circumcision, as practised by the pagan Arabs, from the character of a mere prescriptive usage, into which it had long degenerated; and to have restored it to its pristine rank, as a religious ordinance; by adopting, after established Jewish precedent, the rite of *circumcision*, as its *initiatory fundamental*.

With the christian Church, in which the sacrament of Baptism

were bought into it with money,—as Isaac, a son of eight days, submitted to it—as all strangers, who should afterwards sojourn with the congregation of Israel, and wished to keep the passover to Jehovah, were to receive this sign and seal of incorporation into the Jewish Church,¹ it appears that not only they who could understand its sacred import, and follow in the track of its duties, but they also who in the helplessness and ignorance of infancy, could neither comprehend, nor fulfil the solemn obligations imposed upon them, nor weigh the mighty sum of blessings, into which they were instated, were yet bound to receive the token, and thus join themselves to God in an everlasting covenant, not to be forgotten; but to be all their salvation, and all their desire.*

was substituted for the rite of circumcision, Mahometanism, at the same time contrives to maintain its spurious analogy; since, according to the Mahometan law, *Baptism*, no less than *circumcision*, is accounted *essential* in the admission of infidels to the rank of *Musulmans*. The predilection for Judaism, however, strongly appears in the prominence given to the Jewish rite, in preference to the spiritual Christian Sacrament, which Mahometanism but too willingly lays aside, to return to the carnal letter of the law.”
Foster's Mahometanism Unveiled, I. 404, 405.

¹ Exod. xii. 48.

* “ At the period of its institution, Isaac and Ishmael equally

Very cheerfully did the friend of God obey the injunction of his Almighty portion. Very gladly did the father of the faithful instate his son into that rich heritage, whereof his own portion was so large, so happy, and so secure. Very joyfully did parental love overlook the petty suffering, to be thus undergone by his child; knowing that the light affliction, which was but for a moment, would be connected and overpaid, by faith, with a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Oh, it were well,—it would unfold a wide horizon of joyful hope to the straining eye of parental love, in the bonds of the gospel, if there were a general imitation of Abraham's faith among us,—if we would submit our children, I say not only to the milder yoke of baptismal obligation, but to whatever discipline of mind and conversation might lead them by the work of the Holy Spirit,

received circumcision, as the seal of their respective covenants: and so permanent was its transmission in both families, that in the time of Josephus, after the lapse of nearly two thousand years, the sign of circumcision remained *nationally* in use among the Jews and the Arabians: the one people administering the rite on the eighth day after the birth, in commemoration of the circumcision of Isaac; the other in the thirteenth year, in memory (as the Jewish historian testifies) of the circumcision of Ishmael, their father."—*Foster's Mahometanism Unveiled*, Vol. i. pp. 136, 137.

to choose God in the Person and mercies of his Son, as their portion. They would thus be enabled to reckon, that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in them.

Isaac, was the first fruit of infant dedication to God. How great hath been, since Isaac's day, the harvest of souls to Jehovah, in the Jewish and the Gentile Church, by circumcision, and by Baptism! What shall be the mighty abundance of that harvest, to the ceaseless praise and honour of redeeming love, when the angelic reapers shall appear, with the Son of Man, in his glory, for its in-gathering at the end of the world; when parents and children—that which to the eye of sense appeared mature and immature for the sickle,—the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear, shall be collected in one vast sheaf of redeemed man, for the garner of unchanging blessedness! Christian parents, who have in faith, by the Saviour's own ordinance of Baptism, thus given your children into the refuge of the covenant, and into the open arms of its Administrator's everlasting mercy, pray for that day, in faith, wait for it, in the full assurance of faith; and expect it, in the joy of that hope, which maketh not

ashamed. Did the firm belief of Abraham, lay hold of the divine promises in favour of his child ? and as he saw the blood of circumcision flow from Isaac, was not a well-spring of rapturous hope unsealed, concerning his high destiny as one of the household of God ? And shall not the same tide of the same hope, yet clearer, brighter, fuller, and more transporting, rise within you, as water from the rock in Horeb, smitten by the prophet's rod, when you see your children baptized for new life, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ?

On the other hand, if Abraham had refused to do the bidding of God, by the circumcision of his son, on the eighth day, would he not have rejected the covenant, daringly and presumptuously rejected it, and thus have turned aside the stream of mercy ; leaving Isaac, the son of his old age, the son of his love, the son of God's promise, in the drought and barrenness, the misery and wretchedness, of an uncovenanted state, without hope, without Christ, and without God in the world ?

God therefore, whose name is Love, and all whose dealings exhibit the tenderness of that love, was pleased to choose the children with

their parents professing faith in Him ; to regard them as holy on account of that relation ; and thus to demand their infant devotion to Him, by solemn initiation into his Church. The children of heathen were incapable of this great privilege, otherwise than by adoption ; because they had not been called, and chosen, and separated of God, to the knowledge of his true salvation. Thus moreover, these infants were regarded as believers, although by reason of their tender age they could make no personal profession of their faith. Abraham acknowledged his faith, by believing on Him who justifieth the ungodly, before he was circumcised. Isaac, on the other hand, the very next link in this gemmed and golden chain of promise, was circumcised, before he professed, or could profess, his faith in the world's Saviour ; because, if he lived, he was as effectually bound to profess it, as any adult proselyte was to continue in that belief which he had solemnly declared in the face of the Church, and in the presence of its glorified Head.¹ And I pray you to bear in

¹ Cases to recover Dissenters, p. 324. If children are incapable of entering into covenant with God, as some imagine, before they are taught the privileges and duties of that sacred relation, and are arrived at years fully to understand them, why was Isaac, why

memory this portion of our argument ; because it is the answer to a thousand misrepresentations or misunderstandings concerning the right of the infant children of parents, professing the faith of Christ crucified, to the Sacrament of Baptism : and to all the blessings of that most wisely and graciously-ordained seal of salvation.

It was meet and right also, that circumcision should not only be allowed, but commanded to infants : because of those three deep and solemn truths of religion which it symbolically taught,—the state of man by nature, as a subject of the curse, and an heir of wrath ; the necessity of redemption by blood-shedding ; and the unrepealable obligation of being born again, by the Holy Spirit, into the kingdom of God. In each of these respects it answers to the rite of Baptism, under the new dispensation of the grace of God, except as the former had a *prefigurative* relation to the Redemption price, not yet paid ; and as the latter has a *commemorative* relation to the Redemption

was every descendant of Abraham, and every member of his family, born in it, or bought into it, ordered to receive the seal of covenant initiation, at eight days old, and when by reason of their tender age they must needfully be ignorant of that salvation, in which they were yet called to participate ?

ready accomplished. Circumcision taught, that without shedding of blood there could be no remission:—Baptism teaches, that the atoning blood having been shed, the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit, whereof water is the emblem, and whereof the application by Christ's commandment is needful, has been effectually secured by that redemption price.

I say, that circumcision symbolized the natural estate of man,¹ as born into the world the heir of guilt and pollution. "*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" By the prescription of the age, at which it was to be performed, and by the very nature of the rite itself, it taught, in lines

¹ See Ainsworth on the Pentateuch, p. 69. The Sacraments, especially those of initiation, whether under the Old or New Testament, have respect both to the removal of our guilt, and to the change of our nature. Why should infant or man be circumcised by divine appointment, but to let us understand the propagation of corruption, and derivation of it from man to his posterity? Why should water be appointed, which is of cleansing efficacy, but to let us know that there is uncleanness to be removed? As sacrifices for atonement implied wrath, so this cleansing implied pollution, and therefore guilt? Why is the sign and seal applied by another hand, except to show us, that the blessings conveyed are derived to us from sources beyond our own power to reach—that the blood of Christ removes the guilt, and the Spirit of Christ obliterates the stain?—Blake on the Covenants, p. 368.

of most significant light and truth the universality of original sin. It moreover had a prefigurative relation to the Incarnation of the promised Seed, who was to atone for that wide spread, and otherwise hopeless pollution, by his most precious bloodshedding; and whose sufferings were sacramentally acknowledged and pleaded by the performance of this most significant rite. It connected the native guilt of man, with the doctrine taught from the beginning—taught I doubt not to our fallen parents in paradise, when mercy in Jesus smoothed the frown upon the face of God, that without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sins. And it further taught, although unlike Baptism, it had no promise of conveying, the necessity of a new birth, called the circumcision of the heart.¹ This, says an eminent writer,² was probably the meaning of the ancient Jewish doctors, in asserting that when any man becomes a proselyte, he is like a new-born child. Hence, on the ground of this prevalent idea, our Lord so justly retorts on Nicodemus for his ignorance, “*Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?*” These sages, in their

¹ See Biddulph's Theology of the Early Patriarchs, II. 126.

² Witaius on the Covenants.

triflings with divine truth, and their distortions of its simplicity, taught, that a new soul which came under the wings of the divine majesty, and was received into the embraces of the Supreme Being, dropt down, in its purity and beauty, from some heavenly palace, on him who was circumcised. By these dark and mysterious expressions they probably described that spiritual regeneration, which subsequent unbelief, being unable to comprehend, disregarded as a mere empty sound; but of which circumcision was the sign and seal.

All who were embraced by the mercies of the Abrahamic covenant, with the bright and beaming catalogue of its spiritual blessings, ought, in mere consistency, to receive the initial sign. But infants, as the example of Isaac, and all the descendants of Abraham, whether by wives or concubines, undeniably proves, were so embraced: therefore, they ought, by needful and irrefragable consequence, to receive the initial sign and seal of these mercies—that is circumcision. Is the case otherwise under the gospel, with the exception of an alteration in that sign and seal, of which we shall speak hereafter? Suppose it so, for the argument of a moment, and what follows?

Surely that children under that inestimably precious promulgation of glory to God in the highest, and of good will to men, are far, exceedingly far more disadvantageously circumstanced, than were the children of believers under the patriarchal dispensation, and through every age of redemption in the Jewish Church, before the advent of its Almighty Head in the flesh.¹ And yet we are told¹ that “*God hath provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*”²

¹ “Christ confirmed the covenant made unto the fathers. He bettered it, and no way worsted it. And when He commanded a new seal to be set, instead of circumcision, He did it without altering the substance of the covenant in the least degree. But now, the very substance of the covenant would be altered for the worse, if some persons, formerly received into grace, should by Christ be excluded. Yea, and believer’s children are in a worse condition than in the Jewish Church; which to affirm, were not only derogatory to Christ’s grace, but against scripture itself, which saith, (Eph. iii. 6.) that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews, and of the same body, and partakers of his promises in the Gospel; of which they are not partakers, nor fellow heirs, if so great a part of the Gentiles as their children should be excluded. The infants of Jews and proselytes, at the coming of Christ, had interest and right to the covenant of grace. If that right be taken away, then their condition after Christ is worse than before. Shall they be losers by becoming Christians? God’s grace is not straitened by Christ’s coming; therefore our infants are not excluded.”—*Lyford’s Apology*, p. 46. See also Thomas Watson’s “*Body of Divinity*,” p. 409. See also “*Calvini Institut. Lib. IV. cap. xvi. sect. 5.*”

² Heb. xi. ult.

Nay, under that dispensation, when any Gentile became a proselyte to the religion of the God of Abraham, his children were always circumcised without delay, if their parent desired it; being understood as elected and called of God in that parent. And shall there be less liberty, less privilege, less blessedness to the offspring of professing believers, when the gates of gospel mercy are thrown so widely open; and in defiance as it were of the mind of Him who said as He laid his hand, and opened his heart of love upon infants and blessed them, "*Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.*" It was the wish of those who brought these little ones, that Jesus should lay his hands upon them and pray. He did so, notwithstanding the carnal reasonings of his disciples; and by this most significant act of love He admitted infants to an outward sign of blessing—although it was abundantly manifest, that they were incapable of comprehending what was done unto them, or said, or prayed concerning them. I argue therefore from this practice of our Lord, (and who will dare to doubt its conformity with the mind and truth of God whose fulness dwelt bodily in Him,) that infants are

not excluded from the kingdom of heaven, nor from the grace of the glorious gospel of the blessed God; and consequently, that no man hath a right to exclude them from the outward sign of admission into that kingdom. And if He did esteem it a full and sufficient reason, why little children should be admitted to the outward sign of a blessing, as well as to its substance, because of such is the kingdom of God; then by the same reason infants must be admitted to Baptism, and not debarred from the first entry into the kingdom of Christ; because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them, before they are possessed of actual faith in God.¹

That infants were capable of entering into covenant with God, through the medium of their parents, under the Jewish law, is undeniably argued from the express bidding of Jehovah.² “*Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God—your little ones, your wives, and the stranger that is in thy camp—that thou shouldst enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath which the Lord*

¹ See Lyford's Apology for Public Ministry and Infant Baptism, pp. 41, 42. See also Calvin's Institutes, Book IV. chap. xvi. Sect. 7.

² Deut. xxix. 10.

thy God maketh with thee this day, that He may establish thee this day for a people unto Himself, and that He may be unto thee a God, as He hath said unto thee, and as He hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Thus also we find the keeping of the sanctuary committed to the Kohathites, from a month old and upwards. Why was this? Surely not because these helpless infants could either know the solemn responsibility of their sacred charge, or could be gifted with strength and wisdom to fulfil it: but simply, because their fathers did actually keep it, engaged that their children should keep it when they arrived at maturity of years to be the warders of Jehovah's presence-chamber; and became pledged to train them up for this honour and duty, among the thousands of the camp of Israel. In like manner the great Prophet and Priest of the Church, who took on Himself the seed of Abraham, not only healed many adult petitioners for his mercy, because of their own faith, but extended the demonstrations of health-giving power and love to many children, on account of the faith of parents or of those who brought them beneath his eye, and besought Him for them—thus imputing, as it were, the faith of the peti-

tioners, as the faith of those, in whose behalf they prayed for the exercise of his goodness and grace.¹

I have thus endeavoured to state the preliminary argument for the fitness of Infant Baptism, so far as it may be connected with, and authorized by the Old Testament Sacrament of circumcision, by exhibiting the evangelical nature of the Abrahamic covenant, and the capacity of infants to partake the sign and seal of it, which the unerring wisdom of God appointed. I may have appeared less practical, less immediately dealing with the heart and conscience, less strenuously, instantly, and urgently preaching the whole counsel of God, repentance towards Him, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, than is my duty, my wish, or my wont. But if I shall succeed in making good my positions—if I shall be enabled to shew the scriptural authority for Infant Baptism—the mighty magnitude of privilege and blessedness which it exhibits to the eye of faith—the happy repose whereto it invites a parent's heart, trembling with Christian solicitude for the spiritual interests of a dear child,

¹ See Cases to recover Dissenters, p. 326.

as it unfolds the rich and steadfast promises God in Christ Jesus, then will the subject appeal to Christian parents, and to Christian sponsors, as with a message from the Most High concerning every little one, the fruit of their bodies, or the object of their suretyship at baptismal font—and to every one whom Divine Providence hath invested with the guardianship of a lamb of the Redeemer's fold, in the words of Pharaoh's daughter to the mother of Moses, but with the authority and promise of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in Jesus Christ, "*Take this child away, and nurse for Me, and I will give thee thy wages.*"¹

¹ Exod. ii. 9.

SERMON XXVII.

ARGUMENTS FOR INFANT BAPTISM.

(PART II.)

MATTHEW XXVIII. 20.

JESUS CAME AND SPAKE UNTO THEM, SAYING, ALL POWER IS GIVEN UNTO ME IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH. GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST: TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU; AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAY, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD. AMEN.

THE preceding discourse explained a Scripture, recording the obedience of Abraham to the divine command for marking his son's flesh with circumcision, as the sign and seal of a gracious covenant with him, and with his seed after him. The passage now quoted, describes a similar injunction given by the Incarnate Word, as the last expression of his will upon earth, to make disciples to the faith of his sal-

vation, and to give them an outward visible sign and seal of the grace of that salvation, as it had been purchased by his passion on the cross.

One of the articles of our Church,¹ vindicating the perfect harmony between the various portions of the word of God, declares, that "the Old Testament is not contrary to the New, for both in the Old and New Testament, everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man." Salvation from sin, and the manifestation of Jehovah's glory in it, are the common subjects of both. The Old Testament exhibits a plan, outline, and framework; the New Testament displays a finished building: one shewing us the tabernacle in the wilderness, the other directing us, in admiration and love, to the splendour and magnificence of the Lord's temple upon Mount Sion. "The Old Testament verifies the New, and the New illustrates the Old. The Old shews the promises of God, and the New their performance. By comparing both together, the wisdom of God in his conduct is cleared, and the truth of God in his word confirmed.

¹ Article VII.

The Old Testament delivers the types, and the New interprets them. The Old Testament presents them, like jewels in a casket; the New opens it, spreads them forth, and discovers their value. The Israelites in the Old felt the weight, while they were taught the significance of the ceremonies; believers in the New enjoy their preciousness.”¹

One object of the last discourse was to shew, that the covenant made by God with Abraham, as a federal head, and the representative of a spiritual seed, was, in very truth and substance, the same with that, whereof God in Christ Jesus was the Mediator: and that ever since God called the family of Abraham, and settled his visible Church in it, He hath never suffered that Church to fail. It was an everlasting covenant, made by Jehovah, to be Abraham’s God, and the God of his seed; that he might be the father both of Jews and Gentiles who believe. The Jewish and the Christian Church then, are one, in continued succession, though under different administrations and ordinances. The same spiritual promises and blessings which belonged to the Church under the Old Testa-

¹ Charnock II. 539.

ment, belong also to it under the New.¹ The Jewish Church forms the natural branches: the Gentiles are engrafted into the same stock, into the same true vine, Jesus Christ, the Head of dignity, and the Head of influence to both.

The other object of the last discourse was to shew that circumcision, the door of entrance into this covenant, framed by eternal wisdom, was thrown open to infants, as well as to those of riper years. That circumcision was in general a sign and seal, both of outward privileges, and of spiritual blessings.² It was not only a sign and seal of the possession of Canaan, but of the righteousness of faith. It was not only a sign and seal of the covenant of Sinai, but of the covenant of grace to lost and perishing men.

If these two points were established, we are in a position to consider—

III. THAT INFANTS ARE CAPABLE OF AN INITIAL SEAL OF THE COVENANT IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

The text itself is decisive, as to the general necessity of its application, being the command of Him, who having discharged his priestly office of Atonement upon the cross, hath now

¹ Acts ii. 39. 2 Cor. i. 20. Rom. xi. 16, 17.

² Rom. iv. 11.

all power both in heaven and earth committed unto Him; who speaks therefore with an authority, from which there is no appeal; by a word which shall judge men in the last day; and whereby a fearful sentence is passed upon those who deny the efficacy, and therefore the necessity of his gracious ordinances. ‘If Christ Himself,’ saith Hooker, ‘which giveth salvation, do require Baptism, it is not for us that look for salvation, to sound and examine Him, whether unbaptised man may be saved: but seriously to do that which is required, and religiously to fear the danger which may grow by the want thereof. Had Christ only declared his will, to have all men baptized, and not acquainted with any cause why Baptism is necessary, our ignorance in the reason of that He enjoineth, might perhaps have somewhat hindered the forwardness of our obedience thereunto. Whereas now, being taught that Baptism is necessary to take away sin, how have we the fear of God in our hearts, if care of delivering men’s souls from sin do not move us to use all means for their Baptism.’¹ Howso-

¹ Hooker’s Eccl. Pol. Book v. Sect. 60. See also Sect 57. See also Bishop Taylor on Infant Baptism. Works II. 133. Edition 1836.

ever He, by the secret ways of his own incomprehensible mercy, may be thought to save without Baptism, this cleareth not the Church from guiltiness of blood, if through her superfluous scrupulosity, lets and impediments of least regard should cause a grace of so great moment to be withheld, wherein our merciless strictness may be our own harm, though not theirs, towards whom we shew it: and we, through the hardness of our hearts may perish, albeit they through God's unspeakable mercy do live.*

I deemed it fitting to say thus much upon the necessity of an initial Sacrament into the Christian covenant, at whatever age administered, because there are persons professing the gospel of Christ, professing allegiance to his sceptre, and reverence to his authority, who yet deny and exclude both Sacraments of his grace and love.¹ My argument however must be applied to the fitness of *Infant Baptism*.

When the gospel of life and mercy is newly brought to the hearing, and offered to the acceptance of men, who erewhile had sat in darkness, and the shadow of spiritual death, it

¹ This heresy of the Quakers is only a revival of that in the early church, which rejected the sacrament of Baptism. See Bingham's *Origines Ecclesiasticæ*, I. 460. Sect. 1.

is obviously needful that they should be first taught, confess repentance and faith, and so be baptised as was the case with Abraham, who first believed God, and then received the sign and seal of that righteousness, which he had by faith. But as in his case, when circumcised, (having previously received and closed with the truth of God,) his children were taken into covenant, first circumcised and then taught, even so it is under the brighter mercies of the Christian dispensation, according to the natural consequences of the analogy of faith. And it is a sad error, whereby a mist of darkness and delusion is drawn over the minds of men, to suppose that the covenant of God's everlasting mercy in his Son, comprehends only *actual believers*, who can understand the law of the covenant, and make profession of their faith. This no doubt must be a part of the covenant, but assuredly not its whole extent. By title deeds we purchase and convey lands, to be held in lease or copyhold to our children, who shall be born hereafter, as well as to those already born. And although our children, at that age of mental and moral unconsciousness, knew not what their fathers did for them, yet when they come of age, they claim these lands, by virtue

of the landlord's grant and seal annexed, paying the rent, and doing the covenant suit and service. Even so doth the great and gracious Landlord of heaven and earth, put both us and our children into the copyhold of salvation, confirming it by the seal of Baptism. And when our children come of age to know the mercies of their high inheritance, they may in Christ Jesus, their Head and Surety, claim the good things, and all the exceeding great and precious promises of New Testament life and love, in virtue of God's covenant made to them, through their fathers, and through the Church of their fathers, as surely as they are bound to perform the conditions of their father's covenant on their behalf.

Infants are capable of the thing signified in Baptism, that is, the blood of sprinkling, and the purification of the Holy Spirit, and therefore they have no incapacity for the sacramental sign and seal of those treasures of unimaginable mercy. Infants are capable of grace, therefore they are in a condition to receive its seal. For if they may be saved, eternally saved in Christ Jesus, that capacity is unquestionable. "But of such is the kingdom of God:" therefore that kingdom in grace, and glory, (for the two can-

not be separated) that is, a present and a final salvation, may, upon the sure warrant of eternal truth belong to them. Who then can forbid, that its seal should be applied to them? ¹ We know from Christ's own mouth, that infants may

¹ *Watson's Body of Divinity, folio*, p. 410.—“The Lord Jesus, minding to shew a token, whereby the world might understand that He was come rather to enlarge than to limit the mercy of God, gently embraced children offered unto Him, rebuking the disciples which went about to forbid them to come to Him, forasmuch as they did lead those, to whom the kingdom of heaven belongeth, away from Him, by whom alone the entry is open into heaven. But, will some man say, what like thing hath Baptism with this embracing of Christ? But let us weigh the doings of Christ somewhat more heedfully than such kind of men do. For neither is this to be lightly passed over, that Christ commandeth infants to be brought unto Him, adding a reason why, “because of such is the kingdom of heaven.” If it be meet that infants be brought to Christ, why is it not also meet that they be received to Baptism, the sign of our communion and fellowship with Christ? If the kingdom of heaven be theirs, why should the sign be denied them, whereby there is, as it were, an entry opened into the Church, that being admitted into it, they may be numbered among the heirs of the heavenly kingdom? How unjust shall we be, if we drive away them whom Christ calleth unto Him! If we spoil them whom He garnisheth with his gifts! If we shut out them whom He willingly receiveth! But if we will examine how much that which Christ there did, differeth from Baptism, yet of how much greater price shall we have Baptism, (whereby we testify that infants are contained in the covenant of God,) than receiving, embracing, laying on of hands, and prayer, whereby Christ Himself being present, declareth that they are both his, and are sanctified of Him!”—*Calvin's Institution of Religion, translated by Thomas Norton*, 1578, pp. 554, 555.

be blessed, for He did Himself bless them. Shall we deny the ample virtue of that most efficacious benediction, because we know not the manner of its operation? As well might we deny them the reasoning powers, because we cannot discern those powers in exercise. Shall we deny them to be sinners, because they know not the law, nor the nature of its violation? What then meant that Scripture which declared that "*death reigned even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression?*"¹ Or need we, like the men of Sodom in their blindness, wearying themselves to find the door of Lot's house, go about to understand the manner in which the Righteousness of Christ is applied to them, seeing God is as *gracious* in imputing to them the Righteousness of the second Adam, as He was *just* in imputing to them the sin and condemnation of the first?

If then the nature of circumcision, considered as a Sacrament, was the same within its limits under the Law, as Baptism under the Gospel, it must follow that children, under the Christian, are in the same capacity to receive an

¹ Rom. vi. 14.

initiatory Sacrament, as those under the Abrahamic dispensation, provided they are excluded by no new command, issued upon competent, that is upon divine authority. If membership with the Church, and the act of initiation were no *patriarchal*, or *legal* absurdities, they can be no *evangelical* absurdities. Those whom God hath sanctified, and adopted, and made members of his Church, let no man presume to think incapable of its precious privileges. Yet so rash have been the adversaries of Infant Baptism, as to pronounce those to whom we deem it our solemn duty, that the Sacrament should be imparted, as incapable of receiving it, as the young ones of unreasonable creatures: nay, that it is no less vain, no less impious to pray, that God would pour forth his Holy Spirit upon them, than that He should illuminate and sanctify a stone or a tree.

Let it be granted that infants are incapable of some of the immediate ends and uses for which Baptism was ordained. The same argument, whereby upon this ground they should be excluded, might be pleaded against many who are joined together in the holy ordinance of matrimony. But I go further, and add, that it would be a valid argument against the cir-

cumcision and the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ. He could not possibly answer all the ends of either Sacrament. There was no need of blood to typify the sacrifice for sin on his behalf—there was no pollution of the flesh to put away, there was no remission of sins to be sealed. The Baptism of John, who performed that rite upon our Lord, was the Baptism of repentance; but the Lamb of God who knew no sin, could need no repentance: yet thus it became Him to fulfil all righteousness. The same objections therefore, which may be conjured up by the perverseness of a disputations, or the bewilderings of a scrupulous spirit against Infant Baptism, have equal force against Infant Circumcision; although it was the express ordinance and appointment of God Himself, even as Baptism was afterwards enjoined by the personal incarnation of the Eternal Son, who is very God, and, having assumed our nature, as God and man, is one Christ.

St. Paul, adducing a reason why the woman who hath an ¹ unbelieving husband should not leave him, if he be pleased to dwell with her, implies the right of children within the Chris-

¹ See Townson on the Sacraments, p. 114 et seq.

tian covenant to the blessing conveyed by it, and therefore to the initial Sacrament of those blessings. “ *The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband; else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.*”¹ Surely not holy by natural birth and generation—for such an assumption would be in irreconcilable opposition to his whole doctrine of man’s innate and entire depravity. He rather speaks of a covenant holiness, and so of a title to the privileges of that covenant. The child of a Christian parent brings with it into the world nothing but the corruption of our fallen nature, and the divine promises of the Gospel by Baptism. So that St. Paul, speaking the mind of Christ by his apostolical authority and commission, attributes a holiness to the children of believing parents, whereby they are more capable of Baptism than the offspring of unbelieving parents. And of the holiness whence this capacity is derived, all children, born within the sacred pale of Christianity, within the visible Church of the living God, are partakers, although, (as we have seen) only

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 14.

one of their parents should believe. Shall the privilege be less when *both* profess the faith of Christ, when *both* are reputed holy, through fellowship with the Redeemer's Church by Baptism? For even the holiness which was derived to them, relatively from their parents, before they were baptized, or whereby they became capable of Baptism, was conferred upon their parents in that Sacrament.¹ In the same manner, the Jewish people, the branches, were holy, because the root (the patriarchs for whose sake they were beloved) was holy.² Thus scripturally also affirms our own judicious Hooker.³ "God, by covenant, requireth in the elder sort faith and Baptism; in children, the Sacrament of Baptism alone, whereunto He hath also given them right by special privilege of birth within the bosom of the holy Church."⁴

¹ See Jackson's Works, III. 470, 471. ² Rom. xi. 16, 28.

³ Book V. Sect. 60.

⁴ In virtue of this derived holiness, this inherited holiness of faith it is, that a creature born in sin, whom God could not look upon in itself, but must for ever abhor, becomes capable of being taken within the holy bond of the blessed Covenant; and of having performed upon it the utmost efficacy of the work of the Holy Spirit, which is signified therein. And the child thus admitted, is as truly a member of the Church of Christ, as the oldest saint upon the earth; because the Holy Spirit is as free and as powerful to work his work upon the babe or the child unborn, from the first

It is among those radiant truths, which occupy the eye of faith, and are its most attractive resting-places, amidst all the bright constellations of love wherewith the Bible abounds, that God manifest in the flesh, "*loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.*"¹ From this scripture it may be thus argued;—Those for whom He so offered up Himself, that they might be saved, He likewise intends to bring to salvation, by sanctifying and cleansing them, with the washing of baptismal water. But He gave Himself likewise for infants, that they might be saved; and therefore, infants are ordinarily to be cleansed with the washing of baptismal water, a purification which many who die in earliest life could otherwise never enjoy.²

I must not omit to notice, what appears to me a very powerful argument for Infant Baptism, arising from the solemn command of

moment of conception, as He is to work his work on the hoary sinner, who, instead of having any advantage, hath verily the disadvantage if so it may be called, of years of sinfulness and prodigality.—*Irving on Baptism*, p. 211.

¹ Eph. v. 26.

² Bp. Hopkins' *Doctrine of the Two Sacraments*, II. 406.

the ascending Saviour, rightly interpreted and understood. "Go ye therefore and make all nations disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The words in the original, plainly have this signification, and so they ought to be translated. Our own, and other European versions indeed, render the words, "Go ye and *teach* all nations;" whereby the first occasion was given to the enemies of Infant Baptism. For it being imagined by those who understood not the sacred text in its original dress, that our Lord enjoined all nations, first to be taught and then baptized, they concluded that none ought to partake of this Sacrament, until they had been fully instructed in the principles of the oracles of Christ. But the original word which we render "teach," rather means, "make all nations followers of my faith, disciples to the truth and blessedness of my salvation." ¹ It is thus constantly translated in the oriental versions; and therefore perhaps the sect of anti-pædo baptists never took root in the Churches of the east. Upon this ground, our Lord is so far from requiring, as a necessary prelude to

¹ See Matt. xxvii. 57; xiii. 52. Acts xiv. 21. John iv. 1.

Baptism, that children should be first taught, that He requires rather the Sacrament to precede, and the instruction to follow.¹

The sin of parents has been often urged, as a reason against the admission of their children to the ordinance of Baptism,—the door of entrance into covenant blessings. But surely without good reason. Under the Law, the mother who had borne a man child, was to be regarded as polluted during thirty three days; was permitted to touch no hallowed thing; was commanded to abstain from approaching the sanctuary, until the days of her purification were ended. Nothing however is mentioned in that law concerning the child's uncleanness. It was to be circumcised on the eighth day, and no word is spoken, either of its pollution or purification. They therefore, who can find no let or hindrance in the child to Baptism, but seek one in the parent, to wrong its deep need of this initiatory Sacrament, may thus learn, that while the parent was personally polluted, the child was regarded pure and unspotted, save by the condemning stain of its original

¹ Bp. Beveridge's Works, III. 331, Edit. 1709. Hyde, Christ and his Church, pp. 213, 214.

taint and corruption; of which, circumcision signed and sealed the removal. When the parent might touch no hallowed thing, the child was yet laid under the obligation of infinite love, by a most imperative command, to enjoy the gracious though painful rite of circumcision. In like manner, moral uncleanness in the parent can have no more influence on the child, to bar a similar privilege, than legal pollution; because according to that view, original sin, although transfused by the parent into the child, is no hindrance.

In Regeneration, whereof we will at present simply regard Baptism as the sign and seal. (albeit, I am persuaded that it extends much beyond such limit,—even to an ample spiritual signification and conveyance,) man is merely passive: whence also no outward act is required of one, who was to be circumcised, or baptized, as there is in other Sacraments, but only passively to receive it. Infants therefore, by plain and necessary consequence, are as capable of receiving the Sacrament of Baptism, in this respect, as adults themselves can be.

Where the promise of life, through grace, is given, there the seal of that promise, the very pledge, as it were, of its validity may

surely be appended. But that promise was given, and a strenuous appeal founded upon it to the hearts and consciences of the Jews,—the very people, the adults at least among them, who by wicked hands had crucified and slain the Lord of glory. “*When they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then said Peter unto them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*”¹ But, (retorts the objector,) this scripture pleads hardly against infant Baptism, because repentance, of which they are incapable, is demanded. Nay, but with what cogent reason doth the Apostle press Baptism upon them: surely, by the universality of the promise, and of the blessings which it involved. “*The promise is unto you, and unto your children, and to all that are afar off; even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*” The promise was to their *children* not less than to *themselves*; and therefore their children were equally entitled to the seal of that promise. If they asked, how this

¹ Acts ii. 37, 38.

gracious engagement on the part of God was to be conveyed to their children? the answer has been already given,—“Repent and be baptized.” They who were conscious of actual sin, were commanded to exercise penitence and broken heartedness: they who had only,—only did I say, alas, it is in itself a dreadful and a crushing weight,—but they who had simply, the guilt of original sin, were to have it washed away in the laver of Baptism: and those first motions of life in their hearts, were to be followed by increase of light, joy, assurance, and holiness.

That this argument may not be thought of human imagining, we may observe, that it is used by the same apostle in terms the most express. In the case of Cornelius and his family, he justified his proceeding on this very ground. “Shall we deny Baptism to them who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” As though he had said, They who are capable of the same grace, are entitled to the same sign: but infants are capable of the same grace—that is of the Holy Ghost, (for the promise, the eternal Comforter, the sum and substance of New Testament promise, is to our children, as well as to ourselves,) and therefore they are

entitled to its sign and seal in the Sacrament of Baptism.

I have hinted in the preceding discourse that if Jehovah entered into a covenant with the Jews, which actually involved their children, giving them a sign of its truth, permanency, and appendant promise, He does not so much love the Church, as He did the synagogue, if there be no covenant made with the children of Christian parents. Or, if He hath made such covenant, and yet the seal of it be not allowed to our little ones—that is, unless they are to be baptized, and entitled to the promises of the spiritual covenant of the New Testament in the blood of Christ, as were the Jewish babes in their more dark and shadowy refuge of mercy by circumcision, then this grace, though it may belong to our infant offspring, is most mournfully secret, undeclared, unsigned, and unsealed. And oh what a bereavement of parental comfort is involved in the absence of the broad seal of this Sacrament to parental faith! How sad and darkening the want of that mercy, in outward testimony, which gave the father of the faithful and his believing posterity so much comfort and assurance; and which is not less necessary to the Christian solitudes of parental love, than

it was to the heart of Abraham for his son !¹

We have seen that when the all-sufficient God first gave his covenant to Abraham, He gave withal a commandment, that its sign should be impressed upon the flesh of all whom its wide circumference of mercy might embrace.² When the Lord our Righteousness, renewed and established that covenant, in his own blood, though He changed the sign, He repealed not the command. Nay He added a *new* commandment, enjoining the new sign,—Baptism, without exception of any who had been formerly received into covenant. So that we are under a two-fold commandment to baptize our infants—one, of God who first made the covenant, and gave the commandment, which is still so strongly and surely in force, that if Christ the Lord of his household the Church had not changed it, we were all bound at this day to undergo circumcision; and one, of Christ, who hath changed the sign but not the covenant nor the commandment; and who hath therefore bound it upon the obedience of all who are not excepted out of the covenant; that is, (so far as things

¹ Bishop Taylor, II. 389.

² Gen. xv. 10—14.

revealed tell us,) upon all who dwell within that City of Refuge, the visible Church of Jesus Christ.

Let it be for a moment imagined that the glorious Head of the Church had intended to form one entirely from among the Gentiles, according to the Old Testament usage. What other direction could have been needed, than simply to give a charge to his Apostles, "Go ye and proselyte all nations, circumcising and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Could his intentions have been more emphatically expressed to men, who being Jews, must have had the same apprehension as to the subjects of initiation under the Gospel, as they had entertained under the Law? They had lived under a dispensation where infants were admitted into the Church both by Circumcision and Baptism.¹ And unless they had been instructed to the contrary, they must naturally, and indeed necessarily, have understood their commission to baptize, as extending to infants equally with actual believers. What is the

¹ See proof of this in Wall on Infant Baptism, Introduction to Part I.

message to those men of God, the missionaries, who are at this day holding up the banner of the cross, and carrying the light of divine love, in the Lamb of God, to the benighted realms of impurity and blood, in heathen superstition? "Go ye and baptize all nations." Could one among them possibly imagine, that infants were excepted out of his commission, coming from a land where Infant Baptism had been a constant and universal practice of his Church, knowing it so to be, and having himself, like all around him, undergone the rite?

I will press the argument no farther. Enough has surely been advanced to shew, that, as Infant Circumcision was God's ordinance, in the Abrahamic Dispensation, so is an equivalent rite, that of Baptism, the equal ordinance of the same God, speaking to us by his Son, in the open and unveiled covenant of his love. So decided indeed was the view of it taken in the early Church, that an answer is yet on record made by a convocation of sixty-six bishops summoned by St. Cyprian, about an hundred and fifty years after the apostolic era, to answer the scruples of Fidus an African bishop, who desired to know whether it was rightly permitted him to allow the Baptism of

infants before the eighth day after their birth,¹ seeing that period had been so plainly stamped with the signet of divine authority, for the administration of Circumcision, under the Jewish dispensation. The conclusion was unanimous, that infants were admissible to this ordinance, from the first day of their birth.

I shall hereafter endeavour to shew reasons why Circumcision gave way to Baptism, under the Christian dispensation. In the mean time, if it be an ordinance of God, a Sacrament of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, by the ministration of the Word made flesh, there is the loud and thrilling call of the Most High God equally upon Christian obedience, as upon parental love for infant dedication to Him by Baptism. And John, yet unborn, did not more surely leap in the womb of Elizabeth, at the salutation of her who bare the Lord of glory, than should every Christian parent's heart bound with joy and thankfulness at the command of God to baptize the babe of many supplications, many hopes, many solitudes. *"For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked Him, there-*

¹ See Wall on Infant Baptism, Part I. pp. 44, &c. where the answer of Cyprian is given in length. Ed. 1705.

fore also I have lent him to the Lord, & he liveth, he shall be lent unto the Lord the marginal reading still more beautifies the pious sentiment of this (mother)—*therefore also he whom I have by petition shall be lent unto the Lord*

¹ 1 Sam. i. 27, 28.

SERMON XXVIII.

ARGUMENTS FOR INFANT BAPTISM.

(PART III.)

MATTHEW XXVIII. 19.

GO YE THEREFORE AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST.

THE train of argument, by which I have endeavoured to shew, that infants are capable of initiation into the covenant of mercy, made with sinners, in Jesus Christ for their salvation, is briefly this. At the first institution of Circumcision, Abraham, not as an *individual*, but as a *federal* head, was circumcised at ninety years old; and all the men of his household with him. In like manner, at the institution of Baptism under the Gospel, parents and masters of families, being adult believers, were first baptized.

After the Circumcision of Abraham men of his family, their infant seed commanded to undergo the same promise, in its fullest extent of mercy ing as immediately and as entirely to to their parents. Agreeably to this ordinance, whole families, infants incl those who received the faith of Christ under the brighter mercies of the Gospel, were admitted to Baptism they also had a direct and equal interest exceeding great and precious promise in Christ, made known to them by being, and unchangeably sealed to the death. Independently of the argument Acts ii. 35, we learn, that Cornelius, household and friends were baptized and her household; the jailor of Ph his family; the household of Stephanus the same sign of the covenant; and it ly be imagined that no infants or little were among these communities of faithful. And once more, that as in of circumcision, when any stranger who undergone it became a proselyte of the Church, and wished to join himself Lord within its communion, he was to re

badge of his faith, at whatever period of life he might have arrived. Even so, in these last days, if an infidel shall be converted, he shall be baptized upon his personal profession of faith. I proceed then to offer,

IV. SOME REASONS WHY BAPTISM SHOULD SUPERSEDE CIRCUMCISION UNDER THE GOSPEL.

There are few among the faithful followers of our Lord, few who even in outward confession have taken upon themselves, the easy yoke and mild burden of his gracious law, who hesitate to receive the change of the Sabbath from the last to the first day of the week, in honour of that stupendous triumph of Almighty power, whereby, not the world, and man its tenant, heir and sovereign, were created, as at first, but whereby man's soul was raised from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and his body, sown in the corruption of the grave, was by the risen Saviour, as the first fruits of universal resurrection, raised incorruptible and glorious, from its prison-house of death and dissolution. Yet this change of sabbatical commemoration pleads no express command of the Lord of glory, but rests upon the known custom of his apostles; while the change of ordinance from Circumcision, stands upon the

supreme authority of his own injunction,—
“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” No other sanction can be needed for the alteration, by those, in whose hearts there is a response to the Redeemer's unspeakable love.

The tender wisdom of the change, however, and its moral fitness to the altered circumstances, under which the Church was placed, are no less conspicuous than the supremacy of sovereignty, wherein it originated. He who came to form one Church, purchased by his blood, sanctified by his grace, and made meet for his glory,—resolved, in order to effect that blessed unity and brotherhood in the salvation of his grace, to break down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, to abolish the enmity of ordinances between them, that He might reconcile them into one body on the cross. Circumcision, next to sacrifice, which the oblation of the Lamb of God once offered, had for ever abolished, was the most prominent of these dividing ordinances; and therefore, there was an especial fitness in the institution of some other seal. And while the promises, wherein consisted the power of the signs re-

remained the same, the outward ceremony might well be changed. The Jews had become odious and ridiculous to all other nations, because of this rite. Had it therefore been continued by the Saviour, a stumbling block would have been cast into the way of men's conversion, whereof their great enemy would gladly have taken advantage, to make the faith of Christ crucified, with such a sign of its profession, both hateful and absurd to those Gentile nations, to whose ears the tidings of salvation were brought. The doctrine of the cross, under the most favourable circumstances of its preaching, would be to the Greeks foolishness. He therefore who knew the depths of prejudice in the carnal mind against the revelation of his grace in the *matter* to be proclaimed, resolved that there should be nothing to disgust in the *manner* of its promulgation. And well indeed for the peace and harmony of the Church would it have been, if the preachers of his gospel, and the undershepherds of his flock, had always exercised the same wise and salutary tenderness.

Circumcision was also a rite of such painful nature, that men would have shrunk from it, as Zipporah from the act of Moses: it was

therefore laid aside, as quite inconsistent with the first badge of that service which is perfect freedom: while Baptism was substituted, as an easy ceremonial, which pagans, (as paganism was nothing else than Judaism corrupted by the devil,) practised as well as the Jews; and therefore would be the more readily disposed to receive it.¹ In fact our blessed Lord only applied that which was amongst the most common, to the highest and most sacred use: so that the same element, whereby the body of the new-born infant is cleansed from the pollutions of the womb, should be applied to remove the pollutions of sin, and renew the soul to God. *

Circumcision was the seal of inheritance in the land of promise, and the badge of distinction between Abraham's posterity and all other nations; that so this visible sign might make them strive after the invisible grace which it sealed,—the rest that remaineth for the people of God,—and a walk of corresponding holiness. When therefore Jew and Gentile became one fold, when no peculiarity of clime or country was to be regarded, but there should be one Lord, one faith, one salvation,—when in every

¹ Cases to recover Dimentia, p. 329. * Ezek. xvi. 4, 9; xxvii. 31.

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on he that feared God and wrought righteousness was to be accepted of Him, the rite of appropriation, the seal of a painful and odious singularity gave place to another, more simple and more suitable to its end of grace and general mercy.¹ The rite of circumcision, is moreover abolished under the new testament of redeeming love, by the authority of the great Law-giver; because the blood of the covenant, whereof it was a memorial, which it was designed to prefigure, has been shed upon the cross by the crucifixion of the Lord of glory. While the Jewish people still continue this rite, they declare in effect what in the dreadful obstinacy of their unbelief they constantly affirm, (and that with blasphemies of the name of Jesus,) that the blood of sprinkling has not been shed, nor the reconciliation made between guilty man, and injured, dishonoured, holy God and Judge. Circumcision was used, and blood shed in performing it, to keep in memory the atonement towards to be made by the surety of the covenant: even as sacrifices pointed out to the object of faith, the blood of Jesus Christ which

¹ Lightfoot's Works, IV. 277.

cleanseth from all sin. Baptism, on the other hand, is an unbloody Sacrament, because the atonement prefigured by Circumcision has been made. The Almighty Head and Lawgiver of the Church therefore, has given another mode of initiation into its fold of spiritual grace and privilege, especially pointing to that sanctification which follows, when the blood of Christ is applied by faith to the soul.

St. Paul, beseeching his brethren of Colosse to stand fast in the simplicity of the Gospel, declares,¹ "that they were complete in Christ, who is the Head of all principality and power. He adds, *"In whom also ye are circumcised with the Circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ: buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead."* What means St. Paul by the circumcision of Christ? It is made without hands: it is therefore a supernatural and spiritual act. It is attended with the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, and therefore with deliverance from those burdensome ordinances of purification, which testi-

¹ Col. ii. 10—12.

ried of its uncleanness, the body of the flesh itself being put off. This supernatural and spiritual act therefore, called the Circumcision of Christ, removes that body of sin and death, whose presence the ceremonial law declared. And what is this act, whereof the virtue is so wonderful? Is it not Baptism, which is grammatically, as well as substantially, a part of the whole idea included under the Circumcision of Christ? Baptism then is here pointed out to us, as the name of the spiritual work: and washing with the water of Baptism is the act outward, intended to signify the act inward, done without hands, of putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. For what is a burial, if there be not first a death? And what is the death of a saint, but the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh? If therefore in Baptism we be buried with Him, as it is said, then in Baptism we die with him. If in Baptism we die, and are buried with Him, we are thenceforth regarded by the Spirit, as having suffered with Christ in the flesh: as being dead with Him unto the power of sin, yea, unto the power of death.¹

¹ Irving on Baptism, p. 196. Davenant on Colos. i. 11, 12. Vol. II. 433, &c.

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Circumcision then, is by no means necessary under the Gospel of the grace of God. But lest an outward sign, whereby the minds of believers in Jesus might be persuaded of their participation of spiritual benefits in Him, should be wanting, the apostle shews that Christians have a Sacrament still more express and excellent than Circumcision, the Sacrament of Baptism. This holy and significant rite was instituted by the command of God, through the ministry of our Lord's forerunner. The Incarnate Word sanctified and confirmed it, by receiving it at the Baptist's hand: and in his last act, He commanded it in his Church, even to the end of the world.

It would be an easy task to multiply reasons why He, whose love purchased the Church, and whose wisdom laid the platform of its constitution, should thus have superseded circumcision by Baptism. What have been brought forward, will however be probably thought sufficient. I proceed therefore

V. TO ANSWER SOME OF THE OBJECTIONS MADE AGAINST INFANT BAPTISM.

It has been confidently asserted, and echoed in almost endless reverberations, by the enemies of this tender provision for the lambs

the Redeemer's fold, that no express mention of infants is made in Scripture, as having been admitted to partake the rite of Christian initiation. I have already observed that the argument, if it had weight at all, is equally valid against the change of the sabbath. It may be added, that it would, if admitted to be of force, crush the doctrine of the Trinity, which cannot be found inculcated under that name throughout the whole extent of the word of God. But the Scriptures, on the other hand, are equally silent against deferring the Baptism of a Christian child, until it came to years of discretion. And surely if our Lord, in his capacity of legislator of the Church, hath repealed the privilege of infant initiation, it becomes those who deny it to them to show that repeal, which we are persuaded they can never do. The task of proof lies on them.

It may however be observed, that this silence, so far from being an objection to infant Baptism, is a strong confirmation of its authority. If infant initiation was commanded by God in Circumcision, and approved by Him in infant Baptism, which the Jewish Church added to infant Circumcision under the law, there is more reason why the disciples of our Lord

under the Gospel, should have looked for a positive and express abrogation of the practice, than for a direct command for its continuance. Commands usually precede practices before unknown. To justify the continuance of a rite already familiar to the experience of men, it is sufficient that it be not countermanded. The Jews who so fiercely persecuted the apostles, for abolishing the customs of the fathers, and turning the world upside down, never charged them with refusing to admit children into covenant, which they certainly would, if such had been the apostolic practice.¹ It surely follows

¹ There is indeed an instance apparently in contrariety to this statement. (See Acts xxi. 20, 21.) 'The Jewish Christians said unto Paul, "Thou seest brother, how many thousands of Jews there are that believe; and they are all zealous of the Law; and they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." To remove the prejudice, the great Apostle observed the prescribed rite of purification; and upon the same misperception had before circumcised Timothy. (Acts xvi. 3.) But when he found the Jews abusing this custom, to deduce from it a meritorious righteousness, utterly subversive of the glorious scheme of free salvation, by God who justifies the ungodly, in the Righteousness of his Son, he instantly and with uncompromising severity, protested against that awful perversion. "Behold, I Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of none effect unto

then, that if infants are not incapable of sacramental initiation into the covenant of salvation, nor expressly excluded from it by our Lord, in his capacity of Lawgiver to his Church,—if moreover, they had their share in this blessing of his grace, under the legal dispensation, they are allowed their portion in it under the Gospel; they have a claim, to which the hearts of those who love them in spiritual, not less than in natural bonds of affection, should gladly and gratefully respond. There is far greater reason to conclude, that our Lord would have prohibited infants from the laver of Regeneration in Baptism, if it had been his intention that they should not have been baptised, than that He should have commanded them to undergo this sign and seal of blessedness, if it had been his intention to continue the practice of infant Baptism. It was useless to command what the apostles would naturally have done, unless He had strictly prohibited them; and that prohibition He never gave, because He never, to say the least, uttered a word which could imply the exclusion of children. If on the other hand, infants had

you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." Gal. v. 2—5.

never received the seal of the covenant, it had been not merely expedient, but necessary to command, that it should be affixed to them, in token of their membership with the mystical body of Christ, and as the pledge of his favour. If on the contrary, He had intended to exclude them from a privilege long enjoyed, it must have been by a positive act, an act equally abhorrent from the yearning tenderness of his heart towards them, and from his mission, not to make void, but to fulfil the law.'

¹ See Hole on the Catechism, 4to. p. 480. 'It is urged by those who deny Infants' Baptism, that there is neither command for it, nor example in Scripture, as there was for infants' Circumcision. Now this consideration giveth one ready answer, if there were no other to be given. If Baptism, and baptizing of infants, had been as strange and unseen and unheard of a thing in the world, till John the Baptist came, as Circumcision was, till God appointed it to Abraham, there is no doubt, but there would have been a command or example expressly given, for the baptizing of infants, if indeed God would have them to be baptized, as there was for the circumcising of infants, because God would have them to be circumcised. But when the baptizing of infants had become a thing as commonly known, and as commonly used, long before Jesus came, and to his very coming, as any holy thing that was used among the Jews, and they were as well acquainted with infants' Baptism as they were with infants' Circumcision, it doth not follow that there needed so express and punctual a command or example to be given for the baptizing of infants, which was well enough known already, as there needed for Circumcision of infants or others, which was a thing that till its institution had never been heard of or dreamed of in the world. . . . Baptism was so

They who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, but being without Christ, and without God in the world, were, as I have observed, to be taught the precious truths of salvation, and then baptized. But being thus admitted of the household of God, their children were also admitted upon the warrant of parental faith; and then taught the duties, privileges, glowing hopes, and everlasting blessings of the faith, whereinto they had been by Baptism instated, even as Abraham was first taught, then circumcised, while Isaac was first circumcised, and then taught to know Jehovah, and cling to the mercies of his salvation.

It has been argued, that Infant Baptism cannot be enforced from the Sacrament of Circumcision; because the latter was only a type

strange thing, when John came baptising; but the rite was known so well by every one, that nothing was better known than what Baptism was. And therefore there needed not such punctual and exact rules about the manner and object of it, as there had needed, if it had never been seen before. What needed it, in the Gospel, to tell that such or such persons were to be the objects of Baptism, when it was as well known before the Gospel began, that men, and women, and children, were the objects of Baptism, and were baptised, as it is to be known that the sun is up, when it shineth at noon-day?"—*Lightfoot. IV. 409. See also Lightfoot. Horæ Hebraicæ, on Matt. iii.*

of the former; and consequently not binding, when the substance was come, in the fully revealed salvation of the Gospel. But the case is otherwise. The blood of the legal sacrifice was indeed a shadow and representation of the blood of Christ, and of the absolute perfection, wherewith it purges the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God. The brazen serpent typified Him who was lifted up on the cross; and its virtue shadowed forth the Almighty efficacy of his atoning sacrifice. The deliverance of Noah and his family in the ark, was indeed a type of Baptism, as we learn from 1 Pet. iii. 21. The waters of the flood shadowed out this Sacrament, the ark being a type of the Church, and the waters through which it passed those of Baptism, in the ark of the Church. The pillar of fire and of cloud was a type of Baptism: and so was the water of sprinkling, wherein the ashes of the red heifer had been poured.¹ But the parallel of typ-

¹ See Thomas Jackson's Works, I. 519; III. 355. 'The things which we have spoken, both of mortification and washing are shadowed out in the people of Israel, whom for the same cause the Apostle saith to have been baptised in the cloud and in the sea. Mortifying was figured, when the Lord, delivering them out of the hand of Pharaoh, and from cruel bondage, made for them a way through the Red Sea,

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and antitype holds not between circumcision and Baptism; because the one has no symbolical likeness to the other. Is Baptism a Sacrament of initiation into the covenant of grace? So, as we have seen, was circumcision under the law. Is Baptism a seal of the righteousness of faith? So was circumcision in the elder day of salvation. Doth Baptism confirm the covenant? So did circumcision. In these respects, Baptism does in the gospel day, what its elder sister circumcision did before the day star of that salvation arose upon our darkened

us, and the Egyptians their enemies, that followed them hard at their backs, and were even at their necks, to overtake them. In the same manner also He promiseth to us in Baptism, and by a sign given, sheweth us, that we are by his power brought forth and delivered out of the thralldom of Egypt, that is to say, out of the bondage of sin: that our Pharaoh is drowned, that is to say, the devil, although even so he ceaseth not to exercise and weary us. In the cloud was a sign of cleansing. For as then the Lord covered the people with a cloud, cast over them, and gave them refreshing cold, lest they should faint and pine away with too cruel burning of the sun; so in Baptism, we acknowledge ourselves covered and defended with the blood of Christ, lest the severity of God, which is indeed an intolerable flame, should be upon us. But although this mystery was dark, and known only to few, yet because there is none other way to obtain Salvation, but in these two graces, (mortification and washing) God would not take away the sign of them both, from the old fathers, whom He had adopted to be heirs.—*Calvin's Institutes by Norton, 1578.*

world, besides confirming faith, and increasing grace by virtue of prayer unto God. Circumcision never was the shadow, but the body and substance of a Sacrament. It could therefore be no more a type of Baptism, than the broad seal of England three hundred years ago, was a type of that seal, whereby the acts of our present sovereign are authenticated and confirmed. Circumcision was, in its degree, to the full as real and substantial an ordinance, as Baptism at the present hour: and therefore the latter succeeded to the former, not as the anti-type to the type, not as the rising sun to the morning star, which foretells its brightness but as one positive institution succeeds to another, at the will of that authority wherein both originated, and whereby both or either might be continued or withdrawn.

Some Socinians indeed, argued the fitness of abolishing Baptism altogether in Christian nations, where the great body had already received it; alleging, as the Jews had done before them, that the Baptism of the father sufficed for them, and for their posterity. Socinus himself first gave this poor reason, at which so many of his followers have grasped, if thus they might dishonour Jesus

It matters not, saith he, whether those who are born of Christian parents and profess the Gospel, as did their parents, be baptized or not: equally indifferent is it whether their initiation if it must take place at all, date from infancy, or riper years. And why was this? Is it difficult to discern the enmity of that arch heretic's mind against the great doctrine of the Trinity in Unity,—a doctrine, against which infidelity could hardly hope to succeed (as indeed the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,) so long as persons, whether infant or adult were baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The opponents of infant Baptism¹ have themselves acknowledged that it was practised so early as at the end of the second, or the beginning of the third century: gaining ground, until near the end of the fourth century; when it continued the stated, settled, undeviating practice of the whole Church for eleven hundred years, and more, until the Anabaptists of Munster brought in their opinions; and with them the licence, pollutions, and horrors, that dis-

¹ Rev. C. Jerram on Secession from the Church of England, quoted in the Church of England Magazine, Part X., p. 131.

graced and impeded the Reformation in many parts of Germany. But if it can be shewn that there never were any limitations—that on the other hand, as it was an apostolic practice to baptize infants, so it was continued down from them, even to the day when Luther first hurled the thunders of the Bible against the abominations of Rome; it will equally appear, that they who object to the Church of England Baptism of infants have done so without a cause. Be it then supposed that Christians were now, as it is alleged they were, at the close of the second century, in the uniform habit of admitting only adults to the Sacrament of Baptism. Suppose an individual came forward to assert, that this universal assent of Christians is founded in error, unsupported by apostolical usage, directly in opposition to scriptural precedent; and should immediately and vehemently insist upon the right of infants to the blessings of this sacrament. Would such an extraordinary avowal, and consequent demand, gain immediate credit, and silence all objections? Would it be ushered in to the reception of the universal Church, with loud acclamation of consenting minds, as a Roman General to his triumph in the capitol, followed, welcomed, applauded by every in-

habitant within the city walls? Or would not the announcement rather be treated with contempt, as the dreamings of one beside himself?

If however, contrary to all probability it should gain him proselytes, would not a host of antagonists start up, like the fabled combatants of old from the dragon's teeth, to oppose the strange thing thus brought to men's ears? Would not every advocate for apostolic usage—every zealot for scriptural Church membership, gird on his harness, and go forth to warfare with an enemy so unexpected, and so dangerous? Should it still spread (like the impure and baleful doctrines of Mahomet, over the surface of the Christian world) until amidst all opposition, it was embraced by every denomination of men who owned allegiance to the Gospel, would there be no record of an event so mighty, of a revolution so stupendous? And yet such a change is said to have taken place within the Church of Christ, at the end of the second century. At a period when the practice of the Apostles must have been familiar to the household of God, and their authority unchallenged, it is asserted that every Christian in every Church, in every nation where Christ is named, advocated the exclusive Baptism of

adults, without one solitary instance of exception in favour of infants. All, with one consent, without a murmur of opposition had thrust them from the pale of the covenant. But at this moment the unanimity was disturbed, the universal practice set at nought, and subverted. The new opinion for Infant Baptism made a proselyte of universal Christendom. By what art, by what power could this mighty change be achieved? By what name was the individual who commenced it known; to what nation did he belong? What were his arguments—by what overwhelming force did he silence objection, eradicate prejudice, subdue passion, and lead the whole Christian world bound to the car of this great triumph? We demand the recorded history of this alteration; but we ask in vain. An essential change hath passed upon the Church of the Redeemer. Apostolic usage has been abolished; a practice utterly unscriptural has been introduced; and nobody knows by whom. No record of the controversies wherein the Church was engaged relates that any such change was contemplated, still less that it was effected. To such difficulties are we reduced by the assumption that only adult Baptism was practised until the end of the

second century, and then the Church of God suffered in this respect an entire change of its constitution. We have on the other hand every proof, short of actual demonstration, that infants enjoyed the first blessed Sacrament of the Church in the days of her apostles, and agreeably to the express command of her gracious and glorious Founder.

I pass on to a few of the testimonies left by those fathers of the Church, who were the most competent witnesses of her practice, to whom we can refer, and who, on this ground at least, demand and deserve our reverence, as the best expositors of her practice. Justin Martyr wrote about forty years after the Apostles. He says, "Several persons among us of sixty or seventy years of age, who were made disciples to Christ in their childhood, continue still uncorrupted, or virgins." The term 'made disciples,' is precisely that which has been used by our Lord in connexion with Baptism; and which our translators have rendered 'teaching'—a most forcible proof of infant initiation into the Christian covenant. Again, 'We also, who by Him (the alone Mediator) have had access to God, have not received carnal circumcision, but spiritual, and we have received it by Baptism,

through the mercy of God because we were sinners: and in the same way are all persons enjoined to receive it.'¹ Irenæus was a champion for the faith and truth as it is in Jesus, about sixty-seven years after the Apostolic day. And what is his testimony? 'He (Jesus Christ) came to save all persons by Himself—all, I mean who are by Him regenerated unto God, infants, and little ones, and children, and youths, and elder persons. This regeneration, Justin Martyr most plainly and emphatically refers to Baptism.'² Of this regeneration, infants were plainly capable—and if it were indeed only another name for Baptism, as the testimony of the earliest fathers unite to prove, it clearly shews not only that infants were capable of Baptism, but actually and constantly enjoyed it. Tertullian, who taught about one hundred years after the Apostolic era, gives some reasons, into which it is unnecessary to enter, why Baptism may be profitably delayed, especially in the case of little children; an opinion in which he is singular among his brethren—but the very caution most decidedly implies the prevalence of the custom. Origen,

¹ Wall on Infant Baptism, pp. 13—17. Ed. 1703.

² Ibid. 15.

who wrote about ten years afterwards, observes, "Infants are baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Of what sins, or when have they sinned : or how can any reason of the laver in their case be of good ? except according to that sense which we mentioned even now ? None is free from pollution, though his life be but of the length of one day upon the earth ; and it is for that reason, because by the Sacrament of Baptism, the pollution of our birth is taken away, that infants are baptized."¹ In this passage we have a plain declaration of Infant Baptism, in the very early Church, and that upon the ground of a pollution coextensive with the whole human race. It is unnecessary to bring forward any more from the great cloud of witnesses adduced by the divines of the Anglican Church, for the Apostolic origin of Infant Baptism ; or rather for the Apostolic execution of that large and comprehensive commission of mercy, wherewith the great Head of the Apostles had intrusted them ; and which He had ordained as the entrance door into that fold of salvation, where they were to feed his lambs and his sheep with the bread of life.

¹ Wall on Infant Baptism, p. 34. His series of proofs on this subject is complete and irrefragable.

The preceding discourses may be regarded as a foundation whereon the practical character, the spiritual privileges, the momentous duties, the glowing hopes, the sacred claims and obligations arising out of the holy Sacrament, ordained by the Lord of glory for his Church, must rest. It is for you to judge, with the word of the truth of God in your hands, whether that foundation hath been rightfully, lawfully, and sufficiently laid. If really so, then I would affectionately exhort those who may heretofore have indulged the persuasion, groundless in itself, and cruel to the little ones whom Jesus called in the tenderness of mercy to Himself, whether they may guiltlessly hold early Baptism lightly, and defer it from day to day, from month to month, from year to year? I ask, whether they who cannot help themselves, must be abandoned to extraordinary helps for salvation, whereof we have no assurance, and of which we have no scriptural warrant, while we neglect, on their behalf, adopting the way and means which come to us enforced by a precept of Christ,¹ by the obedience of his Apostles, and by the imitation of the Church? I ask, whether, in short, it be not a

¹ Laud's Conference 1

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neglect, for which we must be prepared to answer unto God, at the bar of eternal judgment, that we have delayed to make our children, in this holy rite, members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven ?

SERMON XXIX.

ISHMAEL'S MOCKERY AND PUNISHMENT.

GENESIS XXI. 8—10.

AND THE CHILD GREW, AND WAS WEANED: AND ABRAHAM MADE A GREAT FEAST THE SAME DAY THAT ISAAC WAS WEANED. AND SARAH SAW THE SON OF HAGAR THE EGYPTIAN, WHICH SHE HAD BORNE UNTO ABRAHAM, MOCKING. WHEREFORE SHE SAID UNTO ABRAHAM, CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN, AND HER SON: FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE HEIR WITH MY SON, EVEN WITH ISAAC.

It is one among those sacred and profitable truths, which the obedience of Christian faith soon learns to lean upon and embrace, that "*the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,*"¹ that the surface of a scriptural statement, hastily or slightly examined, may give no indication of the spiritual

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

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line which lies below: and that, in order to see and enjoy its gracious wealth, we must often make entrances into it from other parts of the divine word. An ordinary reader of scripture, regardless of its references, would see in the text only the record of a petty dispute between two rival children; wherein the mother of one party interfered, and ungenerously took advantage of her power over her husband, to banish the rival of her son from his father's house, and to concentrate the whole of Abraham's heart and possessions upon the object of her own exclusive tenderness. But when the Holy Ghost, by the hand of St. Paul¹ draws aside the veil, behind which little or nothing might be expected, and enables the observer to compare spiritual things with spiritual, a sublime mystery becomes manifested; a picture of amazing grandeur is presented to the mind, dark with the terrors of Sinai, and radiant with the brightness of evangelical light and love. The Law and the Gospel, life and death, blessing and the curse, are there put into a stern and reconcilable opposition, of which the dispute between Ishmael and Isaac, and the relative

¹ Gal. iv.

position of each in Abraham's house, was but a faint and feeble emblem; and the reader is commanded to choose between them.

The primary and obvious sense, must not however, be passed by and forgotten, in that which is secondary and spiritual; although the weight and value of the latter exceedingly transcends the former. In fact, the history is the key to the allegory: it is the holy place which must be passed, in the way to the most holy, if the wonders there disclosed are to be properly understood. I propose then to examine

I. THE HISTORICAL FACT.

II. ITS ALLEGORICAL CHARACTER.

A rapid and hurried glance is all that can be taken. I must intreat you to carry the subject into your closets for prayerful diligent examination: as one that will abundantly repay the time spent in holy meditation upon it.

I. THE HISTORICAL FACT.

Ishmael was thirteen years old, when the long-promised child, the long exercise of Abraham's enduring faith, and of his hope against hope, was given to his prayers, in the birth of Isaac. Of the time when it was customary to wean the child, from the milk of his mother's breast, to stronger food, there is no certainty.

probably differed, according to constitutional vigour, and consequent fitness for the change. Even so, even with such wisdom, and tenderness of love doth the Holy Ghost provide for the spiritual sustenance of the children of God;—feeding them, like the Saviour his disciples, as they are able to bear it. “*I have fed you,*” said St. Paul, addressing the Corinthians, “*with milk, and not with meat : for hitherto ye were not able to bear it : neither yet now are ye able.*”¹ “*When for the time,*” saith the same condescension of Apostolic love, to the Hebrew converts, “*ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one should teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*”² Blessed Lord ! how graciously dost Thou carry the Lambs in thy bosom ; how gently lead those that are with young ! Come, then, and learn of Him ; “for He is meek and lowly in heart ; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

It would appear however, that the weaning took place when Isaac, although very tender in years, was in some degree able to feel the scorn,

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 2.

² Heb. v. 12.

contempt, and mockery of Ishmael. Upon this occasion Abraham made a feast; probably a customary matter, as an act of holy acknowledgment and thanksgiving, that the child of promise, the progenitor of the world's Saviour, had escaped the dangers of earliest infancy, and gave promise of increasing health and vigour. On this occasion of solemn and sacred mirth, when the hearts of Abraham and Sarah, not only as natural parents, but as spiritual believers, were filled with joy to overflowing, Ishmael rudely and profanely mocked. There is no reason to imagine this ill-timed opportunity for a wicked deed, to have been its first commission. It probably grew upon him by degrees; until what was first perhaps an act of sudden profaneness, became at length a habit of settled malignity. And surely this is the very mode, in which the unwearied enemy of man, leads the souls, in whom he rules, to their ruin. *"Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed."* *"Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death."*¹ *"When I saw"* said Achan, (as the

¹ James i. 14, 15.

and of God arrested him in his guilt) "*among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, than I coveted them and took them.*"¹ Sinner, be not ignorant of Satan's devices. Flee to the cross for safety; flee to the Spirit of God for strength to resist them. Believer, keep thine heart with all diligence. Give it by faith into the custody of Christ's Almightyness; that so He may keep it and thee, by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

In what especial manner this mockery, (which is now perhaps first mentioned because it now first fell under Sarah's notice, was exhibited,) the Holy Ghost has not seen good to inform us. It appears almost beyond question to have regarded Isaac's distinguished position and privilege, as the child of promise, and the large inheritance of good, both temporal and spiritual, wherewith that promise was connected. So indeed we may infer, from the words in which Sarah's enkindled anger was expressed: "Cast out this bondwoman, and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not

¹ Joshua vii. 21.

be heir with my son, even with Isaac." Ishmael had been partaker of that holy instruction, which Jehovah testified that Abraham would communicate to his household, and to his children after him. He therefore could not be outwardly and literally ignorant of the vast and various blessings which were enwrapped within those promises, to a child of a birth so strange and miraculous as Isaac. With that carnal mind then, which is enmity against God, with that envy towards the distinction of others, which loves to poison their happiness, while it stings and envenoms its own to death, he derided and scoffed at Isaac.

It was no less a mockery of Isaac's God and portion, than of himself. Proud of his greater age, perhaps of his natural gifts; of high and unsubdued frame of heart, Ishmael counted spiritual mercies nothing. He profanely dared to scoff, in the bitterness of an unbelieving spirit, at one who possessed blessings, whereof he knew not the value, and therefore despised the preciousness. Well said the Saviour, foreknowing how fearfully the ever blessed Gospel of his grace and love would arouse the strife and hatred of men's minds against it, and against those who should cling to it, as their soul's

and portion, "*Think not, that I am come
to peace upon earth: I came not to send
but a sword. For I am come to set a
t variance with his father, and the daugh-
t against her mother, and the daughter in law,
at her mother in law: and a man's foes
be they of his own household.*"¹ Blessed
! is this possible? May it indeed be, that
message of mercy from the Father's bosom,
from the cross;—a message, of which every
breathes Glory to God in the highest, and
earth peace, good-will to men—peace and
will, purchased at no meaner price than
the pouring of thy blood, should cause strife
and dissension between hearts which love should
be together in the holiest bonds? Is it pos-
sible that the very seed of life eternal, when
sown by the same hand, should spring up,
not to a harvest of malice and bitterness
but to their nearest brethren according to the

It is the enmity of the serpent's seed
not the seed of the woman. It is the devil
in the unbeliever's heart, fighting against Christ
in the believer's heart;—hating the image
of the Son of God, even in a brother; and

¹ Matt. x. 34—36.

making all the charities of life, that should utterly quench and overcome such hatred, like a screen of flax before the refiner's fire. "*Cain the first murderer was of that wicked one, and slew his brother: and wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*"¹ Such feuds divide and distress families at this day. A knowledge of salvation, in the all atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, with a resulting desire to serve Him in holiness on the one hand; and a contempt of salvation—a hard, impenitent, unbelieving heart, like the rock in Horeb, as yet untouched by the rod of Moses, on the other hand, break that charity, which is the very bond of peace and of all virtues. They aggravate every difference, embitter every dispute, and shed gall and wormwood into the intercourse of every hour. *It must needs be—* (for so the Great Amen hath said,) *that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.*² There is no malice deeper, there is no feud more bitter, than that which the godlessness, unbelief, pride, presumption, and blindness of the human heart, in the things of God and salvation, engender and nur-

¹ 1 John iii. 12.² Luke xvii. 1

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are there against those who love their Heavenly Father in sincerity, and would follow peace with all men. The very tenderness of kindred and connexion, the very narrowness of the battle field, whereon the strife between those who are Satan's, and those who are Christ's—a combat of aggression on the one hand, and of passive resistance, in holy meekness on the other—the very narrowness I say of the battle field—which is just the walls of the same house, the seat around the same table, the outward worship around the same family altar, and it may be, the pillows of the same bed, cause the conflict to be more fiercely waged on the one hand, and the more powerfully sustained on the other:—even as civil broil and war are more sanguinary, fought with friends and fellow countrymen, before their own doors, than those carried on between foes of different countries, on a neutral soil.

Whatever was the spring of Ishmael's mockery, (and that it was a profaneness such as Esau afterwards exhibited, we cannot doubt) the Holy Ghost hath taught us, in St. Paul's application and exposition of the passage, that it was a persecution. “*As then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after*

*the Spirit, even so it is now."*¹ Mark, then, ye, whom love to your Lord—faith in Him, working by love, constrain to desire his glory, own his name, and delight in his holy Law, even amidst the contentions and opposition of those, to whom that Name, that Law, that Glory are a by-word and a reproach—mark what the faithful and true Witness hath told you by his Spirit—what indeed was substantially told you by the Angel of Jehovah—the Word of the Lord in human flesh, from the first display of the serpent's enmity; "*They that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.*" The serpent's seed shall bruise your heel, in these trials, as the serpent bruised the heel of Him whose you are, and whom you serve, in temptation, persecution, and on the cross. But in your patience possess ye your souls. Hear Him, whose voice of salvation, has heretofore sounded so sweetly in your hearts; and obey his precept, while you rejoice in Him, and glorify Him for his love. "*I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.*"²

¹ Gal. iv. 29.² 2 Tim. iii. 12.³ Matt. v. 44.

Beware, however, of affecting heroism in religion. Avoid any resemblance to that spirit of unhallowed eagerness for martyrdom, though in the cause of Jesus, and the truth as it is in Jesus, which marked a decided declension from the pure simplicity of his faith in the earlier ages of the Church. Wait until you fairly meet the cross; then take it up thankfully, and meekly bear it after Christ. Watch well over your own spirits; “*watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*” Let it be seen that nothing can embitter your own love; that it never burns more brightly, never aims to melt and subdue, by its gentle mightiness more strenuously, than when it is most bitterly and determinately opposed. Adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things. Bear witness to the beauty of holiness, the lightness of the burden, and the easiness of the yoke of your Redeemer, by the consistency of a Christian walk. Here will be a testimony for God, more powerful to convince gainsayers, than if you could speak like the sons of thunder in argument and dispute. Your communing with an angry and opposing world, should resemble that of Jehovah, when he came to the prophet, at the entrance of the cave in Horeb; not in the

wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in the still small voice.

The anger of Sarah was enkindled, on beholding the mockery and persecution which Isaac was enduring at the hand of Ishmael; and she immediately addressed Abraham in terms of the utmost urgency, that the youth should be driven forth from the house, and from all participation in the heritage. The Holy Ghost tells us, by St. Peter,¹ that Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, in token of a wife's fealty, duty, and subjection, according to the appointment of God Himself. Yet here we find her using language, rather of the most determined and independent resolve, than of meek and gentle entreaty. How may these things be? The answer is plain; there might be, no doubt there was, much of the partiality of parental love, much of the passion of human anger in this requirement. But as Balaam, in after days, was constrained, (enemy and opposer of God as he was,) to bless when he would have cursed, and only to speak that which the Lord put into his mouth, so here, faithful Sarah, amidst all the risings of natural

¹ 1 Peter iii. 6.

temper, is overruled by the Spirit of God thus to speak, for purposes of immeasurably higher signification than could be comprehended in the mere request for Ishmael's removal. It was a demand for separating the holy seed from the profane, whereof perhaps even the father of the faithful himself did not so immediately perceive the necessity, because affection for Ishmael was a mote in his eye. It was not merely to send away one who derided and persecuted his brother, and mocked at that glorious vision wherein Abraham saw the day of the Son of Man, with all the blessings of salvation that dawned and broke upon the world in its brightness ; thus impiously turning God's chiefest mercy into a laughing stock. It was not merely a resolve to have a son removed who thus dishonoured his father's faith and his father's God, disturbing the peace of his household with strife and bitterness of spirit. It was not merely the desire of discarding one, whose conduct thus proved his ungodliness, and whose example, if it failed to excite a salutary dread and horror, might be productive of imitation to Isaac's own sin and misery—a consequence at which parental solicitude, parental love, parental tenderness, in a believing mother,

for a child's soul might well tremble. It was not merely this result, which such a mother's eye might contemplate as a dreary horizon of vast and urgent danger, to her own peace, to her son's hopes, to her husband's honour, to the very glory of God. It was more, much more than this. It is beyond all reasonable question, that Sarah's mind and tongue were governed by a secret instinct and influence of the Holy Spirit of God. Under his supreme direction and agency, not less mighty, because it moved not upon the surface of her consciousness, she was the minister of a great and terrible judgment against profane and wicked Ishmael. By this act of expulsion, (for such it almost was, rather than a request for it at Abraham's hand,) she undoubtedly fulfilled one of the hidden purposes of the divine mind, to be brought to light nearly two thousand years afterwards; and became one of the characters in an allegory, whereby the Church of Christ Jesus was to be instructed through all succeeding time of his Gospel dispensation. She was thus to shew in type and figure, what after ages should see, as a body of divine and gracious truth,—the nature of the law of works; the manner in which legality opposes itself to the

Righteousness of Christ; the enmity of unbelief against the truth of God, and the God of truth; whether that enmity strike with the sword of actual violence, or, being providentially restrained from having such power, darts its envenomed shaft against the Lord, and persecutes Him, by ridiculing his people, his truth, his honour, his holiness, and the blessedness of his faith, in the hearing of those who glory in his cross.

The anger of Sarah was kindled, not only against Ishmael, but against his mother, here distinguished, not more broadly by her name, than her country. "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she bare unto Abraham mocking." And at this time, as some imagine, began that four hundred years affliction of Egypt, spoken of. Gen. xv. 30. The bondwoman had been already driven to flee from Sarah's face when she dealt hardly with her. At the bidding of the angel of the Lord, who met her by the fountain of water in the wilderness, she had returned, and, outwardly at least, had submitted herself under the hand of her mistress. Ishmael was not then born. Sarah's continued barrenness had probably led Hagar to expect the birthright for that son, whom the Lord had

given her. And when at length the stupendous miracle of Isaac's birth effectually dispersed that vision, as an early cloud, or as the morning dew, before the sun rising in heaven, envy at Isaac's superiority of temporal and spiritual privilege, uniting with a sense of injury at Sarah's hand, might perhaps induce her to encourage this temper of unbelief, mockery, and persecution in her son towards the child of Jehovah's power and promise. Alas! we know not what manner of spirit we are of. They were apostles of the Prince of peace,—one of them, that disciple whom Jesus loved, who wished to call down fire from heaven, and consume the Samaritan village, that refused to receive their master. Our unhallowed passions will assume strange forms to gratify themselves, and to do the work of Satan within us, for sin and sorrow, as well as the work of Satan without us, for confusion and mischief: even as when the great enemy took the serpent's form, to gratify his malice against God, and to wound Jehovah, if it were possible, through the happiness and life of his yet unsinning creature. But woe to that house, (for there is guilt, there will be shame, and strife, and division,) in which a parent, whether father

or mother, can be so far led captive by the Devil, can have so much of the spirit of that destroyer of souls, as to take part with an irreligious child, in mockery or persecution of any who love the Saviour within the same family.

*"Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were good for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea."*¹

O beware how, by the feeblest, by the most indirect encouragement, you put a child into the seat of the scorner, and teach him how to join the uncircumcised in heart, against the people and cause of the Redeemer. You know not what you do. You may be laying a match to the train, which shall kindle an explosion, wherein your peace and the peace of others may perish. You may be raising a storm, which one day you would give worlds to hush; but which may howl and rave around you and them, until it make shipwreck of souls for ever. Nor can I discover within the dark and dismal range of those awful judgments, wherewith the Son of Man, when He cometh in the consuming glory of his latter day, shall overtake

¹ Matt. xviii. 6.

and overwhelm them who know not God, obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, sentence of condemnation more terrific, than that which awaits a professing Christian perverted by whose evil example, or whose wretched perjury, he has placed himself in a position of guilt against the Gospel of salvation, and who, as a child of God, tends to fix the same rebel and opposition of heart in a son or a daughter. Flee from such a position of guilty peril, flee from such a gulph of coming misery. Whither shall ye flee? To Him who will receive you with arms of love, as widely stretched to embrace you, as when they were extended on the cross, to comprehend a lost world in his salvation. Flee to Him, who, though your sins have been as scarlet, will make them white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, will make them as the pure and spotless fleece of wool. Flee to Him who will take you no longer to make your children pass through the fire unto the Moloch of your unholy and guilty prejudice against his grace. He will give you spiritual love and spiritual power, the rich outpouring of his Holy Spirit, whereby you may bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, as members of his family in heaven and earth, which is named

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the name, bought with the blood, sanctified with the Spirit, and adopted into the heritage of Christ Jesus.

Abraham deeply and dearly loved his eldest son. He had already pleaded spiritually for him before God, when his faith hardly dared to lift up its eyes to the fulfilment of the promise in Isaac. And now that Sarah, speaking by the Holy Ghost, (for St. Paul asks, "What saith the Scripture,") demands Ishmael's dismissal, "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son." But mark the triumph of faith in this stern exercise of self-denial. He hears and owns Jehovah's voice by Sarah's lips. He hears the command of God, and is prepared for the sacrifice, as afterwards to make a dearer offering upon Mount Moriah. "*Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman: in all that Sarah hath said unto thee hearken unto her voice: for in Isaac shall thy seed be called: and also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.*"¹ And thrice blessed is that man, whose faith places all the objects of

¹ Gen. xxi. 12, 13.

SERMON XXIX.

Dearest affections at God's disposal; makes
not only willing to go forth with them,
whithersoever God in mysterious providence
may call him; but to dismiss them from his
wishes, and from an undue place and influence
his heart's affection, as the Saviour dismissed
his spirit on the cross, when God saith unto
him, "Be it so." The thing will seem grievous
indeed, when beheld with the eye of natural
love; but when the love of God, realized by
faith, and the wisdom of God, seen by faith,
are present with God's bereaving call with
his heart, he girds up the loins of his mind
endure the trial, to acquiesce in the separation
he lays his hand upon his mouth, and his mind
in the dust, to say, "It is the Lord, let
do what seemeth Him good,"

In closing the historic portion of this
subject, I may observe

1. *How differently the same unseen
riches of divine grace in Christ Jesus, are
guarded and dealt with by the believer and
infidel. Abraham laughs for joy at the
of Isaac; because he beholds in him's
and glorious vindication of the truth.*

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word and promise. Sarah laughs with sacred delight, that she shall have pleasure in her son, a pleasure wherein Abraham her Lord shall so largely share.

Jehovah expressly orders that his name shall be called Isaac : that is, *Laughter*. There is great cause of hallowed joy,—more especially, when Abraham, looking from Isaac's birth to the Incarnation of the everlasting Word of God, sees his far distant day, and leaps for gladness. The most substantial part of all these mercies,—a personal interest in the salvation of the Lamb of God is equally put, if he will believe, into Ishmael's power. But Ishmael turns the whole deep mystery of redeeming love, and believing blessedness into scorn, and ridicule, and persecution, in Isaac's person. The term *mocking* means laughing. The believer's laugh of holy joy, the heart's deep thankful merriment of praise and gratitude, and love, and hope, and blessedness, was upon the lips of Abraham and Sarah. Ishmael's laugh, on the contrary, was the infidel's contemptuous sneer, deriding the whole plan of mercy : despising God's chiefest gift ; provoking the Most High to exclude him from the privileges of Abraham's house ; and (as a typical emblem of the scorner,) from the

house of salvation in the gospel. Beware, then, lest any one of you fall into the same condemnation of unbelief. There is the same cloud to the Israelite and to the Egyptian, and the same Jehovah in it: but it hath a double face; it is light and love to one, threatening and wrath to the other. "*We are a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish; to the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life.*"¹

II. As this Scripture gives a solemn warning to the scoffer and the infidel, so it ministers comfort and assurance of hope to the believer, when called to suffer for the truth's sake. He that now lets may continue to let; but he will be taken out of the way. Yet a little while and the trial shall be passed; yet a little while, and the furnace depths, trodden by the feet of patient faith, shall be trodden no more. The voice of the Great King, in present providence, or in a nearly approaching deliverance by other means, shall cry to his tried and tempted ones: "*Ye servants of the most High God, come forth and come hither.*"² Some of the Redeemer's disciples may be exercised with family

¹ 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

² Dan. iii. 26.

oppositions, and find hindrance where they might more fitly look for support. Well, fear ye not,—but pray with martyred Stephen, “*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*”¹ “*When a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*”² “*If ye were of the world, the world would love its own,*” said our Saviour, “*because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*”³ “*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*”⁴ See that your faith be active enough to reconcile the providence with the promise. See that your faith draw sweetness out of this cross. See that your faith bring its bough of marvellous virtue, for these bitter waters; and they will not only be tolerable, but medicinal. All these things, trying as they now are, will be among those appliances of your Father’s love, and your Saviour’s tenderness, which, rolling on the wheels of unerring providence, (the eye of God being in the wheels,) shall work together for your good. As your afflictions abound for Christ, your con-

¹ Acts vii. 60.² Prov. xvi. 7.³ John xv. 19.⁴ John xvii. 35.

solutions also shall abound by Christ. The persecution cannot hinder the blessedness. It is God's gift that you are *called* to suffer, and *enabled* to suffer: and "*the light affliction which is but for a moment, shall work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while you look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*"¹

¹ 2 Cor iv. 17, 18.

"From Abraham, by his two sons Isaac and Ishmael, went forth a two-fold progeny, and a two-fold promise. In each progeny the promise of Jehovah has, in point of fact, had a double accomplishment,—a temporal and a spiritual. Isaac, the legitimate heir, through Judaism and Christianity, has given laws and religion to a great portion of the inhabited world; Ishmael, the illegitimate seed, through the primitive Arabians, and the variously incorporated Moslems, has given laws and religion to a still larger portion of mankind. Isaac new modelled the faith and morals of men—first, through his literal descendants the Jews,—and secondly, through his spiritual descendants, the Christians. Ishmael effected a corresponding revolution in the world—first through his literal descendants the Arabs,—and secondly, through his spiritual descendants, the Turks and Tartars. In the case of Isaac, the change was wrought by the advent of Jesus Christ; a person, uniting in Himself, by divine appointment, the offices of Prophet and Apostle, of Priest, Law-giver, and King. In that of Ishmael, the change was effected by the appearance of Mahomet, a person professing to unite in himself the same offices, as by the divine appointment.

The blessing promised by God to Abraham in behalf of his son, was necessarily a divided portion, since "the son of the bond woman

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could not be heir with the son of the free woman." The division, it is observable is apportioned with strict regard to this grand distinction, both in the wording of the two promises, and in the matter-of-fact accomplishments. The promise to Isaac is eminently a promise of spiritual blessings: and it issues accordingly, in the establishment upon earth, through his offspring, of a purely spiritual kingdom. The promise to Ishmael is predominantly a promise of a temporal blessing: and it appears to issue accordingly, in the establishment upon earth, through his offspring, of a temporal, as well as a spiritual domination. The birth of Isaac was the subject of promise; and the Messiah, the Heir and dispenser of his blessing, came by promise. The birth of Ishmael was *not* the subject of promise; and Mahomet, the only analogous inheritor and conveyance of his blessing, came without promise. Isaac was the legitimate seed; and conformably with the dignity of his birthright, became the rightful promulgator, through Christ, his Descendant, of the true faith of the gospel. Ishmael was the illegitimate seed; and consonantly with the disadvantage of his birth, became the suitable progenitor, through Mahomet his descendant, of the spurious faith of the Koran.

While therefore, prophecy holds forth Isaac, the child of the Spirit, the son of the free woman, the legitimate seed, as the forefather of the Messiah, and the source of the only true religion; prophecy cannot be supposed to recognize in Ishmael, the child of the flesh, the son of the bond-woman, the illegitimate seed, any thing higher than the forefather of a false prophet, and the source of a spurious faith.

"The apostle Paul, in his scriptural allegory, observes, that, "as when, he that was born after the flesh *persecuted* him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." An allusion, which indicates farther, that, while prophecy invariably represents Isaac as the parent of a religion of peace, prophecy could present Ishmael to our view in no more favourable light, than as the father of a religious persecution.' See Foster's *Mahometanism Unveiled*, vol. i. pp. 71, &c. The work presents much ingenious and striking matter upon the subject of Abraham and his sons, in the character and fortunes of their descendants.

SERMON XXX.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE TWO COVENANTS.

GALATIANS IV. 22—26.

IT IS WRITTEN THAT ABRAHAM HAD TWO SONS, THE ONE BY A BONDMAID, THE OTHER BY A FREE WOMAN. BUT HE WHO WAS OF THE BONDWOMAN WAS BORN AFTER THE FLESH: BUT HE OF THE FREE WOMAN WAS BY PROMISE. THESE THINGS ARE AN ALLEGORY: FOR THESE ARE THE TWO COVENANTS, THE ONE FROM THE MOUNT SINAI WHICH SERVETH TO BONDAGE, WHICH IS AGAR. FOR THIS AGAR IS MOUNT SINAI IN ARABIA, AND ANSWERETH TO JERUSALEM WHICH NOW IS, AND IS IN BONDAGE WITH HER CHILDREN. BUT JERUSALEM WHICH IS ABOVE IS FREE, WHICH IS THE MOTHER OF US ALL.

No prophecy is of private interpretation. It comes not from the prophet's own suggestion or invention. He is only God's organ in what he declares: "*for prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*"¹

¹ 2 Pet. i. 21.

St. Paul was under the same safe and salutary law, in giving a typical character and reference to any portion of the historical Scriptures in the Old Testament. That reference was suggested to his mind by the unerring Spirit of God, as one of the great items of scriptural truth; as one of the strong and beautiful links of connexion between the instructive shadows of the Old, and the bright realities of the New Testament.

Without such an appropriation of the record concerning Sarah and Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac, contained in Genesis xxi, the great apostle would never have realized it in his own mind; nor if it had been brought home to his apprehension, would he have rashly adventured to lay it before the Church, as part and parcel of the whole counsel of God. And well doth the same caution become every student of the Bible: well were it, if the same reverential awfulness dwelt in every man, while considering and speaking of the mind of God. The Kohathites were not to go in to see when the holy things were covered,¹ lest they should die. The men of Bethshemesh, with all their

¹ Numbers iv. 20.

reverence for the ark, were smitten in great numbers, because they lifted up the mercy-seat to look what lay beneath it.¹ And some things there are in the divine word, "*which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*"² A morbid desire to find a type, an allegory, a hidden meaning and an application to some deep mystery of God, in the most plain and ordinary narratives of the Bible hath spread, and doth yet pour forth wild confusion over the Church of Christ; and no testimony against it can be too strenuous or urgent. Our walk of safety and profit, in the paths of typical interpretation, will be to tread where the Holy Ghost hath opened the way, and thus graciously invites us to follow Him in light and truth.

Under this guidance of plenary and absolute inspiration, we connect St. Paul's doctrine in the passage now before us, and its context, with the personal history of Abraham. And I know not how any cautious interpreter could, by possibility, have drawn this contrast between the legal and the Gospel covenant, without the

¹ 1 Sam. vi. 19.

² 2 Pet. iii. 16.

and teaching of that Eternal Spirit. authorized, thus preceded, thus beckoned, thus instructed, it is alike our duty and privilege to bring Moses and Paul together; and to draw instruction from the history of historical fact with typical significance. The history has been laid before you, and reflections as it appeared naturally to and enforce.

THE SPIRITUAL TRUTH CONNECTED WITH IT, NOW DEMANDS YOUR ATTENTION.

Paul having referred to the state and circumstances of Abraham's family, his wife, Hagar, and their respective sons, designates these things as an allegory. What does the apostle mean by this term? An allegory, etymologically and simply considered, signifies that when one thing is mentioned, another is to be understood. Of this figure of speech there are various examples in Holy Scripture. Take one from profane history. It was a common proverb among the Greeks, to say, "Nicias is at Corinth:" meaning thereby, "Nicias has fallen from an exalted to a low condition." The proverb had reference to Nicias, who, being expelled for cruelty from his kingdom in Sicily, fled to Corinth, and

there became a schoolmaster. There was no other relation than that of resemblance in reduced circumstances, between the dethroned king, and the person to whom the proverb was applied.¹ Thus too, in the Scriptures, it became a saying in Israel, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" merely to signify any thing strange, sudden, and unexpected.

With these preliminary remarks we are in a position to examine the apostle's statement:

The whole passage, from the 22nd verse to the end of the chapter, is meant to detach every one, into whose hand it comes, whether Jew or Gentile, from a dependence on the law, which is the covenant of works; and to lead him to seek salvation, through the better covenant of grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. The subject embraces the state of the Church at this day, as effectually, and emphatically, as it did eighteen hundred years ago. It is an allegorical representation of the different foundations whereupon men are resting their hopes of eternal life and blessedness: and of their different conditions in the view of a pure and holy God. The whole Christian world may be divided into the

¹ See Quintilian, quoted by Pierce, on Gal. iv. 22.

great classes, most widely separated from other; of those who depend upon their works, and those who depend upon the all-act Righteousness of Christ for salvation.¹ In which of these parties is our place, and portion?

Abraham then, in this rich vein of the evangelical mine, may be regarded as a typical representative of the visible Church of the living

The word of Jehovah had called him from the idolatries of Chaldæa, to dwell alone, not to be reckoned among the nations. His family was to be solitary and separate, free from all surrounding superstitions and abominations. His own ancestors, in the line of Shem, had not escaped the wide-spread apostacy from

The recollection of a more pure worship had not indeed have been altogether obliterated.

Their unhappy superstition, however, was now to have added a dreadful infusion of idolatry which was modelled and brought to perfection in the plain of Shinar. With

few exceptions the whole earth was sunk in a mass of rebellion against the Most High God, as effectually, as deeply, and, (with-

out the interference of an Almighty arm,) as hopelessly as were its highest hills, and lowest valleys beneath the waters of the overwhelming flood. Abraham alone knew the character and perfections of Jehovah. He alone truly cast all idolatry behind his back. He alone understood the great secret of salvation by the promised Seed. He alone comprehended the deep blessedness of faith in the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. He alone had that faith imputed to him for righteousness. He alone embraced the exceeding great and precious promises of a divine revelation, whereof the Everlasting Word, in due time to become incarnate, was the substantial glory. With him alone therefore, was true religion to be found, with all its harvest of a full salvation. In his tent and at his altar, the acceptable worship of Jehovah was celebrated, and sinners found approach to a reconciled God, by the new and living way, which had been cast up for them in the God-man, when the bickering flame of the Cherubim turned every way to hinder the lost man from seeking the paradise of life eternal, by the covenant of works.

Behold Abraham then, a type and emblem of the Church of Jesus Christ! It stands, as he

ent, alone in the world's wilderness. darkness of paganism, unrelieved by any light, save when the torch of truth is brought by the hand of a faithful herald of Christ's salvation, it, covers by far the largest portion of the world, as it bows and groans beneath Satan. The imposture of the false religion holds millions in its chain. There is in the remnant, a profession of true religion mingled, debased, degraded, and corrupted by God, by an infusion of idolatries, which have been poured into it, until its simplicity, and power, have been mournfully and extensively injured.

The Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure doctrine is preached, and the sacraments duly administered, according to Christ's ordinance; those things that of necessity are to be observed, are the same."¹ She is the pillar and buttress of truth: she is the *mother* of saints, who are born again of water, and of the Spirit in baptism. She is the *nurse* of the young, whose hand and ministration the

¹ Article XIX.

bread of life, and the water of life, the wine, and milk, and honey, of evangelical privilege, in the person and office of Christ her glorified Head, are dispensed. She is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. She is the chosen seat of Christ's dominion, governed by the sceptre of his eternal love, enlightened by the manifestations of his presence, upheld by the power of his providence, washed from sin in the precious laver of his blood, sanctified by his grace, taught by his word, restored in wandering by his Spirit, called to witness unto his glory; the habitation of his presence, and the place of his chosen rest. Her privileges are vast, her immunities, such as in their extent and fulness cannot be contemplated by the clearest eye of faith, while yet the believer sees only through a glass darkly. Their grandeur, their length, and breadth, and depth, and height will be measured only by the spirits of just men made perfect, when the glorified soul and the glorified body shall be filled with all the fulness of God.

In Abraham's family however, while he himself was a depository of divine truth, there was a wife and a concubine—a free woman and a bond woman. Each had a son partaking of her

own condition—the one a free man, the other a slave. He who was of the bond woman was born after the flesh, before Abraham's body became dead, and while yet sons and daughters might be given to him, in the course of nature. He who was of the free woman, was by promise—the result of Jehovah's undertaking, and most gracious engagement made with him, when his body and Sarah's womb were both dead, and only quickened by that Spirit who is the power of God, because He is the God of power. That promise he received in the depths of his heart; faith was its echo there, and prolonged God's voice of love and truth, through the expectation of many years, until the appointed season came, and the word of the Most High was fulfilled. "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith giving glory to God." The family therefore of Abraham, although one in name, was composed of members exceedingly different in character and circumstances. Abraham indeed, treated both with exact and impartial tenderness. There was the same circumcision, as a rite of sacred initiation into spiritual relationship with God, and instatement into the fulness of divine promise and privilege. There was the same

nurture, provided from the riches wherewith Jehovah had so amply endowed him. There was the same sacrifice, whereby the regard of all the household was pointed to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, as their only hope, and their only salvation. There was the same instruction, to inform them of Jehovah's will, and fit them for obeying it. But the membership of his family was composed of materials so different and discordant, that the same advantages, the same treatment, the same care, the same tenderness, were followed by the most contrary results.

It is thus in the visible Church of our Redeemer, whereof Abraham and his household were significant emblems, provided for our instruction by the wisdom and goodness of the Holy Ghost. It is made up of two parties, who live under the same law of the same kingdom of gracious love: who are baptised into the same faith; who are fed by the same pure word of Christ, in the preaching of his Gospel; who have participation in the same Sacrament of his death and passion; whose eyes are directed to the same all-prevailing atonement for sin, and the same unchangeable righteousness of God in

Christ, as the believer's portion, to life eternal. There is, I say, the same impartial tenderness of the Church towards every one who hath a name to live in her family, a place in her sanctuary, and to whom is given the opportunity of drawing nourishment unto life eternal from her bosom.

But the parties, as I said, differ entirely with regard to their spiritual position in that Church, and their relation to its glorious Head. The one, albeit by Baptism they who compose it have put on Christ, are still living after the law of the flesh; they are branches in Christ, but bearing no fruit; they are children of the Church, but through neglect of baptismal privileges that filiation is according to the flesh, rather than according to the Spirit:—they have a name that they live, but they are dead to God. They are consecrated to Him by baptismal profession: they have been made partakers of its blessings; they have an outward liberty in the gospel of Jesus; yet all the while they are children of the bondwoman, as to their real, that is, their spiritual state.

The other characters “who compose the elements of the earthly Church,” are “*born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the*

*will of man, but of God."*¹ They are renewed to God by the effectual operation of the Holy Ghost. They have received the Lord Jesus Christ into their hearts by faith: they have communion with Christ by personal and living oneness, maintained through the same faith: and therefore they are the heirs of those exceeding great and precious promises given to the spiritual children of God, in order that they may be partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust. Holiness is their high calling; and it is their heart's desire to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. "*All,*" then, in the highest, dearest, most profitable, and most precious sense, "*are not Israel which are of Israel: neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children: but in Isaac, shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*"²

Abraham's family then was a type, nay, more than a type, of the militant Church. It was the very root of that celestial vine, which God,

¹ John i. 13.

² Rom. ix. 7, 8.

having preserved until this day, still acknowledges as his own, and towards which his husbandry is yet continued. But in the Apostle's allegory, Hagar, whose posterity dwelt in the wilderness, represents Mount Sinai, around which that wilderness was spread. The name is put for the thing signified. She describes

(II.) *The state of those under the Law of ceremonies.* It was promulged amidst the thunders of that mountain, which gendered unto a bondage of ritual observances, utterly without value, or power unto salvation, save as the eye of faith might behold in the blood of bulls and of goats, offered on the altar of the sanctuary, that blood of Jesus Christ who through the eternal Spirit afterwards offered Himself without spot to God, that He might purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God.

The name is put also for those who are seeking justification, glory, honour, and happy immortality, from the moral law. They are unhappily ignorant, that this immitigable Law demands the absolute unsinning, unswerving obedience of the whole man,—body, soul, and spirit; thought, word, and deed—a holiness like that of God, of whose purity and perfec-

tions it is a glorious transcript. But while man is utterly powerless to fulfil the demand, the law gives his miserable impotence, (to say nothing of the absolute and total alienation of his sinful nature) no tittle of spiritual power and sufficiency, wherewith to meet its requirement, and expect recompence on the ground of merit. In this respect Hagar and her offspring answer immediately to Jerusalem, the Jewish Church under the legal covenant, and therefore under a system, not of gracious hope and privilege, save as the law was a schoolmaster to bring her members unto Christ; but under a stern and iron yoke, entering continually into the soul, preventing the access of all liberty and all the privileges of spiritual freedom, and eventually ministering to expulsion and death.

Hagar is also, by a natural extension of the allegory, a general and enduring representative of the covenant of works, and all her descendants, all the spiritual Ishmaelites of Abraham's professing family, are under the same condemning and enslaving dispensation, however openly they may be enrolled among the members of Christ's holy Catholic Church. Every citizen of this Jerusalem, whether in Paul's day, or in our own, whether within the Jewish

or the Christian fold and family, is under a dispensation of bondage, as enclosed within the prison house of the covenant of works. A heavy yoke is upon his soul. He is a debtor to do the whole law ; and he cannot truly discharge one atom of its demand. He is under the bondage of its tremendous denunciation, "*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.*"¹ He is in bondage to the god of this world ; whose hopeless slave the legalist must be, until he fly to the liberty of Christ Jesus. He is the bond-slave of his own inward corruptions : for while the law can only give the knowledge of sin, it arms the very pollutions of man's carnal heart against the purity of a holy God, and the exceeding breadth of God's requirement. He is utterly unacquainted with that blessed freedom of access to God, in any and every act of worship, which belongs only to the children of promise. His feet are fettered in the way of holy obedience ; and not one step can he tread along the delightful road of filial duty and service. He may look through the bars of his prison, while others walk at large in the light and

¹ Gal. iii. 10.

liberty of the Gospel of peace. But he must remain within its walls, until the Son shall make him free, and then he will be free indeed. He earns the wages, he does the will—and, as the most dreadful element of all his slavish state, he *loves the service* of Satan. The spirit of Cain is in his heart, the spirit of the murderer; for he loves not the Saviour, nor the Saviour's disciples. Deeply buried there and dreadfully fruitful is the spirit of mocking persecuting Ishmael. He which is born after the flesh will persecute him that is born after the Spirit. Mount Sinai was not, geographically, more absolutely without the limits of the promised land, than that unhappy soul, a bondman under the covenant of works, is spiritually a stranger to the family of the true Abraham, and to the abounding mercies of that "*kingdom of God, which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*"¹

(III.) While Hagar however represents the enslaved and unhappy professors of religion, who in the very bosom of Christ's visible Church, have no inheritance in its mercies; *Sarah represents the true, living liberated members of*

¹ Rom. xiv. 17.

*Christ's spiritual Church, the children of heavenly and unchangeable promise, the heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, those happy members of his body, who are washed, sanctified, and justified in his name, and by the Spirit of our God.*¹ The Saviour hath redeemed them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them. They are delivered from its yoke, that they might receive the adoption of sons. And “*because they are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore they are no more servants, but sons; and if sons, then heirs of God through Christ.*”² For them deliverance has been wrought from the unhallowed and hopeless expectation of establishing a legal righteousness before Him who chargeth even his angels with folly, and the heavens are not pure in his sight. “*They are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that they should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead; that they might bring forth fruit unto God.*”³ “*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made them free from the law of sin and death.*”⁴ And their feet being shod

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 11. ² Gal. iv. 6, 7. ³ Rom. vii. 4. ⁴ Ibid. viii. 2.

with the preparation of the Gospel of the atonement, they find the way of delightful to their hearts; desiring to be in the fear of God. Their love made as far as it may be in this state of darkness, casteth out fear, because fear hath fled. Believing in the Saviour, and knowing their portion,—God's covenant of love with all its full inventory of mercies, to be sure to them by his death, and seals their hearts by the witness of the Spirit rejoice in Him with a joy unspeakable of glory. They are members of the Jerusalem which is above; not yet indeed of the triumphant, not yet of the Church of Christ in its latter-day glory, when the New Jerusalem shall descend from God out of heaven, a bride adorned for her husband; but of liberty, peace, and rest, whereinto they believe now enter; and which form the elements, as far as they may now be realised, the earnest pledge and foretaste of the eternal and glorious sabbatism that remaineth for the people of God. That Church is established above in heaven, because its commencement is from the election and grace of God, dwelling in light, unto which no man can approach;

it was from Christ the Mediator, when He dwelt in the rest and bliss of his Father's bosom; because its Head of dignity and influence dwells at the Father's right hand, far above all heavens; and because the Church dwells with Him there by faith, until He shall come again, and the tabernacle of God shall be with men. Blessed children, are they of that blessed Church, their mother, and the Redeemer's bride. They shall be fed by the breasts of her abundance, in the word and ordinances of truth. They shall grow up in all things unto Christ their Head. They shall be prepared for their place at the altar, and for their reign on the throne, among those who shall be kings and priests unto God and to the Lamb. "*They are dead, and their life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with Him in glory.*"¹

This divine allegory hath a resting place in the long lapse of ages between Abraham and Paul. The history was spiritually applied, and proclaimed by the Holy Ghost, in the rapture of Isaiah's prediction. "*Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into sing-*

¹ Coloss. iii. 3, 4.

SERMON XXX.

and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail
 a child; for more are the children of the
 desolate, than the children of the married
 wife, saith Jehovah." ¹ Sarah, whose womb
 is dead, whose husband Abraham was as
 good as dead, might well be called desolate :
 while Hagar, who bore Ishmael when the
 patriarch was younger, might be called the
 married wife. Yet Sarah's offspring became
 like the sand by the sea shore innumerable, and
 far exceeded the number of Hagar's race the
 Arabians. The Gentile, as well as the Jewish
 Church, both here and in the Apostle's argu-
 ment, are pointed out by the Holy Ghost,—a
 great multitude, whom no man can number,
 of all countries, and kindreds, and tongues, and
 people, "who should wash their robes and make
 them white in the blood of the Lamb," and who
 should be congregated round the throne of the
 Lamb for glory everlasting, are here beheld in
 the prophet's vision, the travail of the Redeem-
 er's soul, the gems and brightness of his medi-
 torial crown, "when He shall come to be glor-
 ified in his saints, and to be admired in all them
 that believe." ² The conversion of the Jew

¹ Isaiah liv. 1.

² 2 Thess. i. 12.

and the fulness of the Gentiles will complete that family of blessedness, and God shall be all in all. The doors of that house, the joys of that family, are open and offered to all: for if ye be Christs', then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

(I.) *Tell me then, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?*

Hath not this allegory testified, as with the clearness of a trumpet-call, to which family you belong, what are the present circumstances, what will be the future destiny of that household of bondage, unbelief, and the spirit of persecution? You are born of the flesh. Your relation to God, under the law and covenant of works, is not that of promise. Your obedience is not that of grace, but of nature; and therefore it is only outward in the flesh and walk of a visible conversation and profession; instead of being inward, from the true circumcision of the heart. God's visible Church hath received you into her bosom, numbered you among her children. In that house of the living God, in its appointments and ordinances of life and salvation there is bread enough and to spare. There is instruction, discipline, encouragement, and every means for growth in grace. And con-

cerning that visible Church, with all its appointments of love, with all the tenderness of care bestowed upon it; and with all the vast and varied train of its spiritual privileges, the great Husbandman may well ask, "*And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge I pray you between me and my vineyard: what could have been done more for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?*"¹

But what is your position in the visible Church? You are the bad fish in the net. You are the guests without the wedding garment, at the marriage feast. You are the tares among the wheat. You are bondslaves, among the members of a family of freedmen, made so in Christ Jesus. Your portion is with Ishmael, and not with Isaac. And if you thus remain, what saith the scripture, "Cast out the son of the bondwoman; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." The tares may abide with the wheat; and will so abide, until the harvest. But then the winnowing fan will be spread out; the breath of God in judgment will give it effectual motion; and the separation between that which is to be laid

¹ Isa. v. 4.

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in bliss, and that which is to be burned with fire unquenchable, will be entire, final, eternal. Your lot will be in the desert, far from God, and from all that God in Christ is, and ever shall be to the believer. The covenant of works cannot save you; it can only condemn you.

Ishmael's expulsion was grievous in Abraham's sight, because he was his son. The Church of the living God mourns over every member of its pale, that is dead and enslaved, amidst the rich means of life and liberty. But when the sentence which Jehovah pronounced by Sarah against Ishmael shall be in spirit pronounced against the legalist and self-justiciary, the son of the bondwoman of the covenant of works, then the Church shall acquiesce in that awful decision, which casts from her bosom every unbelieving member, and shall justify the most high God in his judgment and doom of everlasting excision. Turn then to the strong hold. Stand with God against your state of bondage and your inheritance of wrath: and to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts. May the Holy Spirit soften them to truth and love, that you may be no longer children of the flesh, but heirs of the promise!

(II.) "*Now, we brethren,*" saith the apostle, *addressing his children in Christ Jesus,*¹ *Isaac was, are the children of promise;*" as the crowning conclusion of the whole argument, with the momentous truth which it involves, he adds, "*So then, brethren, we are children of the bondwoman, but of the free.*" To whom is this cheering and happy testimony applicable? To whom can we say, as part of Paul's ministerial responsibility, and, earnestly desiring to have fellowship with him in the yearnings of ministerial love,—to whom may we appeal, as to Isaac's spiritual brethren, children of those vast, and sure, and highly gladdening promises, which, unto Sarah's seed, to the true and living members of Christ's Catholic Church, are all yea and amen to the glory and praise of God? We trust that the Spirit may bear witness that ye are the children of God. If so, ye are made partakers of the Holy Ghost, not only in the ministry of the word, and in his outward helps, but in his inward work upon your hearts. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad. Your privileges and possessions, in this gracious membership with

¹ Gal. iv. 28.² Gal. iv. 31.

living Church of the living God, no eye can see, no hand measure, no imagination conceive, in their extent of grace, mercy, peace, hope, and joy. Walk then consistently with the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made you free. You are no more servants; but sons. Regulate your conversation accordingly. Your blessings are all *in* Christ, all *from* Christ, all *by* Christ. Give God in Christ then all the glory. The bondservants abide not in the house; they must be cast forth; but the son abideth for ever. Do the great master of that house such service, as becomes his children. Bear testimony to the greatness of his love, and to the happiness of his family. Bear testimony to the holiness which becometh his house. “*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*”¹

¹ Matt. v. 16.

SERMON XXXI.

HAGAR'S FINAL EXPULSION.

GENESIS XXI. 14.

AND ABRAHAM ROSE UP EARLY IN THE MORNING, AND TOOK BREAD, AND A BOTTLE OF WATER, AND GAVE IT UNTO HAGAR, PUTTING IT ON HER SHOULDER, AND THE CHILD, AND SENT HER AWAY: AND SHE DEPARTED, AND WAYDROVE IN THE WILDERNESS OF BEERSHEBA.

THE path of human life is traced through an intricate and tangled labyrinth, wherein men wander up and down, walking in a vain shadow and disquieting themselves in vain, unless faith in the word and truth of Jehovah be the golden thread to guide their footsteps along the proper paths, and to lead them safely, though often mysteriously, towards the rest that remaineth for the people of God. The way will frequently appear to run in directions entirely contradicting the dim sight and unbelieving suggestions of sense: but He who is light, and in whom

dwelleth no darkness at all, leads his confiding people "*by the right way, that He may bring them to a city of habitation.*"¹ And when the faith, whereby their varied pilgrimage is trodden, shall be swallowed up in vision, they shall look back upon its darkest and most painful portions, with adoring gratitude to Him, whose wisdom appointed them, whose love illumined them, and whose sovereignty overruled them for good.

By this safe directory of faith was Abraham conducted, through the long and eventful pilgrimage, between the time when he went forth, at God's bidding, from Ur of the Chaldees, to that in which he slept the sleep of the blessed, a hundred years afterwards. It overruled his affections supremely; it guided him securely; it upheld him mightily, throughout the painful transaction, whereof the text forms a part. The whole history has a strong claim upon our regard and prayerful contemplation, as one of those instructive instances, which exhibit the sovereignty of the Most High overruling the ordinary transactions of family life, by mysterious influences. It is written for our instruc-

¹ Psalm cvii. 7.

tion, that we also may look, and learn how absolutely, although not so visibly, He who ordereth all things, both in heaven and earth, dispenses our common and every day concerns with a wisdom that cannot err, and a love that never fails those children of his grace who desire to be directed by the one, and supplied by the other. The fountains of both are opened, and their streams are poured forth from the exhaustless fulness that dwells in Jesus Christ.

We have before us a threefold subject of consideration.

I. THE CONDUCT OF ABRAHAM.

There is a simplicity of touch, combined with a breadth of effect in the slightest sketches of the Bible, whereby the pictures which it sets before us, are stamped with the incontestible proofs of his divine hand, who gave them to the Church, for its edification, its furtherance, and joy of faith. Such is eminently the case in the representation before us. It is an exhibition of the most yearning natural tenderness, breaking forth into most affecting sorrow, when it was so severely wounded, by Sarah's demand for the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael. And yet, that tenderness is restrained; it is not permitted for one moment to lift up a voice of

complaint against the dealing, or of opposition to the will of God.

*"The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son."*¹ Abraham had long clung with fondness to his first born; and seems almost to have in this instance also hoped against hope, that the God of his mercies, the God of truth, would alter the thing that had gone out of his lips, by transferring the promised spiritual blessings, from a son yet unborn, (and whose birth, except by the interposition of some stupendous miracle was impossible,) to the child whom God had already bestowed upon him. *"O that Ishmael might live before thee."*² This natural and becoming sorrow fills the heart of Abraham, and bows it to the dust in heaviness. Is it not then wonderful, that there should be no utterance of a similar but far mightier feeling,—no record that any such emotion existed towards that awful command of God, which afterwards laid upon him the burden of sacrificing his son Isaac, whom he loved, and in whom he looked for the coming of the Son of man, on the errand of a world's salvation? How shall we explain this paradox? How are

¹ Gen. xxi. 11.

² Gen. xvii. 18.

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seeming contrarieties to be reconciled? Is the tenderness of the father, and the vaulted faith of the believer to be vindicated? Abraham feels grievously his wife's requirement, cast out the bondwoman and her son; but there is no record of any inward struggle, when afterwards bidden of God to offer the child of many promises given to him with signs and wonders, upon Mount Moriah, for a burnt-offering unto Jehovah? The difficulty, if such there be upon our minds, may be solved, by simply considering the manner in which Abraham at first apprehended the call. It seemed to come from Sarah's jealousy,—from the untrained passion of a fond and doting mother, inconsiderately, extremely, and uncharitably resolved to punish an offence against her own child. It seems as though, in that blindness of the claims of Hagar and Ishmael upon her husband's protecting love; overlooked the misery they might endure, if her harsh requirements were granted, and the sad privation which they must certainly undergo, by being thrust forth into the wilderness. It was therefore merely in accordance with the dictates of Abraham's parental love, to mourn over

demand: but, under the obligations of parental duty, to resist it, by endeavouring to convince Sarah of her improper wrath; or, failing of producing such conviction, to interpose his authority, and exact the submission of his wife.

But when that voice which seemed to be the utterance of Sarah's prejudice and resentment, is testified to be suggested by the Holy Spirit,—when God saith, “Let it not be grievous in thy sight, because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all things that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken to her voice,”—then the sorrow of Abraham's heart is hushed. He becomes still and submissive. He is prepared to make the sacrifice of his own will, and to offer up his most cherished affections, according to the bidding of his Almighty Friend: and no murmur of discontent is heard from his lips. Like Aaron, he holds his peace: like Eli, he cries, “*It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good.*”¹ His soul's conflict ceases; faith obtains the victory; and the father of the faithful finds peace in believing. Blessed are they who walk even as he walked, trust as he trusted, yield as he yielded, and overcome as he overcame.

¹ 1 Sam. iii. 18.

It is the sacred duty of every one, upon whom the providence of Almighty God has laid the solemn responsibility of parental relationship, to guard his own heart well, and prayerfully, and watchfully, against parental partialities or distinctions between one and another of the children whom God hath given to his prayer. He must resolve with unswerving steadfastness against exhibiting or permitting any preference beyond the approbation of virtue, and the discouragement of sin, among the members of his family. Like God he is to be no respecter of persons: but to deal out tenderness and love, rebuke and chastening, with no other rule than the law of God, and no other desire than to please Him. But when God's pleasure is made known, through the truth of the divine word, concerning the duty towards any child, or when in the manifestations of providence the finger of God seems to demand a sacrifice and a separation, however it may wring his heart with sorrow, and fill his eyes with tears, it becomes him to ask a spirit of holy submission from God, who never gives a stone when his children require bread. In that spirit, so sought and so obtained, he must follow God in the way of appointed trial; girding up the loins of his mind,

and looking for the fulfilment of that wise and gracious saying, "*What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.*"¹

No duty was ever bound upon the child of God, without being inseparably connected with the promise of God, for mercies either providential or gracious, or for both. The remark is realized in Abraham's experience. "Of the son of the bondwoman will I make a great nation, because he is thy seed." Ishmael shall not inherit the spiritual promise, which Jehovah's eternal purpose and counsel hath vested in Isaac: but the child shall still be beloved for the father's sake. A promise is reiterated, as a strong confirmation of Abraham's faith and hope. It was given to Hagar, when she fled from Sarah's face, before Ishmael was born. It was repeated for the patriarch's consolation, when his laughter at the assurance of Isaac's birth had in it almost as much of unbelief as faith. "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly: twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." And now a blessing shall rest upon him, because he is Abraham's child.

¹ John xiii. 7.

Here then is a general truth, which believing parents may hold firmly to their hearts, when obliged by the apparent direction of God, to send forth their children into a world of trial, slenderly provided. They may plead with the full expectation and assurance of faith, that the seed of the righteous shall not be forsaken; and that the same God, who has supplied all their need "according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," will remember his covenant with the father and mother, in his dealings with their children. Have ye one pleading of supreme desire; O that Ishmael may live before thee? Then assure yourselves of providential, and (though you may not live to discern them,) of spiritual and gracious bestowments, suited to the wants of the body, and the infinitely more pressing and momentous necessities of the soul, vouchsafed to your children.

The nature of the authority whereby Sarah spoke, once admitted,—her voice being felt as the voice of God within his heart, Abraham makes no delay. Whatever might be his tossings to and fro, through a night, in whose dark and silent watches duty and tenderness were at strife within him, the victory is never doubtful, because the faith of God, and the God of faith

with him. He makes haste and delays not
up the commandments of his great and
our Lawgiver. "Abraham rose up early
morning, and took bread, and a bottle of
and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on
shoulder, and the child, and sent her away."

blessedness of holy decision in the path-
of God! It does Him honour by the
ness of obedience; and it plucks up those
of bitterness which too frequently and
take hold of the heart, when it listens to
and blood instead of instantly hearing and
ing God. Abraham in the Old, and Paul
New Testament, are distinguished exam-
ples of this swift and ready obedience. "*When
used God to call me by his grace, immedi-
I conferred not with flesh and blood.*"¹
That mind alone can feel this holy readi-
ness wherein the love of a reconciled God
; wherein his will is hidden, as the tables
law, beneath the blood-sprinkled mercy-
of the ark of the covenant. Those feet
will be swift to run the way of God's
commandments, which are shod with the pre-
son of the Gospel of peace. That soul

¹ Luke xv. 21.

only will spring forth to follow God, in paths of sacrifice and self-denial, which feels the constraining influence of the love of Christ.

But why are Hagar and Ishmael dismissed from Abraham's house thus scantily provided? The banishment itself was surely an affliction deep and bitter enough, with every alleviation that gifts and plenty could provide. Is it not therefore to heap one cruelty upon another, that these rejected ones should be sent forth with a loaf of bread and a bottle of water: for I know not that we have reason to imagine ~~those~~ things to be representatives of better and more plentiful food? Was there not a servant that could be spared to attend them? Was there not an ass out of Abraham's field, nor a camel from behind his tent, that could have been laden with some good things by the way? No doubt there were enough of both. Is not Abraham then hard of heart, in denying them such help and support? There is no evidence, no presumptive proof, thus to convict him of unnatural indifference, whether those lately so dear to him, lived or perished in the wilderness. The strong probability is wholly in his favour, that he acted in this matter, as might be expected from a tender parent, an affectionate

master, a true believer, and a friend of God. There was bread to sustain them, until they should come to the place whither Abraham's foresight had no doubt directed them. The water skin contained enough to refresh them, until they reached the appointed well, which he no doubt had fully described. Ishmael was at least seventeen years old, and therefore far beyond the age of helplessness; and there is much reason to suppose that the man of God never intended that he should journey into some far distant country, whither the solitudes of a father's tenderness could not follow, to assist and bless him, as need should be. Hagar's grief seems to have made her miss the way and the well, and wander entirely contrary to Abraham's purpose, in the wilderness. The separation was absolutely necessary, as a consequence of the divine declaration, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called:" lest in any future time, Ishmael should be reckoned, equally with his younger brother, as of Abraham's privileged family; lest in short, he that was born after the flesh should be confounded with him who was born after the promise. But this decree of God being regarded, every other arrangement of Abraham seems to imply his strong desire that

his first-born should dwell near him, to share his tenderness and power. Behold the path of duty for every relation of life, traced out by the finger of the Holy Ghost! Obedience, the fruit of holy love to God, is the first and great commandment, at whatever sacrifice it may be performed: and the second is like unto it,—the exhibition of all possible kindness, affection, and consolation, towards those whom that unshrinking discharge of sacred obligation may involve in inconvenience, privation, or sorrow.

This remark may fitly introduce the second subject of meditation.

II. THE GREAT DISTRESS OF HAGAR AND ISHMAEL.

It seems to have been the determination of that wise and holy God, who will certainly make the sins of men to find them out, although if they close with the means of life, and look in faith to the cross, He will blot out the eternal condemnation pronounced against impenitent unbelievers, that Ishmael should be taught by this painful and humiliating dispensation, how dangerous and destructive it is to abuse gracious privileges, and thus receive the goodness of God in vain. Once put forth as a severe chastening from the fold and pasture of Abra-

ham's family, the two mistake their way. Instead of abiding near the footsteps of that flock, which God had marked for his own,—their course, like that of the prodigal son, is towards a far country. Their means of life are expended; they begin to be in want; and while there is bread enough and to spare,—while there are wells and watersprings by Abraham's tent, they perish with hunger and thirst. How surely must they who sow to the wind, reap the whirlwind! How surely must a process of humiliation and trial await the proud, and those who mock and persecute the faith of God, if indeed, in the freeness of his sovereign mercy, they are restored and pardoned at all! They must expect the well-spring of some earthly comfort to be dried up, and themselves led to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, by paths of shame and suffering. Their contempt of spiritual privileges is visited upon them, and they must know, that it is an evil and a bitter thing to depart from the Lord their God. And it is a dealing of especial love, however painful in its manifestation, when the God of all grace thus hedges up the wilful transgressor's way with thorns; brings him, by the Holy Spirit's sanctification of outward trial to

himself; hastens him to his offended Father's feet, at the throne of grace, there to cry, "*I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*"¹

The wilderness through which they wandered, had no path, no food, no water, no friendly inhabitants to help and guide them. It was a waste and howling desert, and, the water once spent, they were hopeless of more. How great the difference between their case, and that of Isaac's children, when they wandered over the same parched and fiery wilderness, as the angel of Jehovah led them through it, from the bondage of Egypt, to the rest and plenty of the promised land! They had bread from heaven, the sacramental food of God's provision. They had water from the rock, to follow their footsteps, and refresh them. They had the pillar of fire and of cloud, to guide them with infallible certainty through the trackless waste. Their clothes were not worn, neither did their feet swell during forty years; and the good will of Him who dwelt in the bush, never left them for a moment. Even so vast is the difference between those who endure

¹ 2 Cor. i. 3.

trials, according to the mind of God, and those whom affliction overtakes in the way of sin ; or whose transgressions have led them into paths of bereavement and affliction. The one party is privileged to say, "*If our afflictions abound for Christ, our consolations also abound through Christ.*"¹ the other wander and are weary, like Noah's dove over the waters, until the hand of mercy brings them into the ark. Jehovah in Christ is the hiding-place of the one : He shall preserve them from trouble ; He shall compass them about with songs of deliverance. The other have no repose, unless the Spirit of God bring them to the ever-ready grace of salvation, that in its most merciful Author, they may find rest unto their souls. "*The man who wandereth out of the way of understanding, shall remain in the congregation of the dead :*"² but if from thence he shall seek the Lord his God, he shall find Him, if he seek Him with all his heart, and with all his soul.

It is easy to account for the comparative helplessness of Ishmael. Young persons are more speedily fatigued, than those of maturer years ; the fluids of the body are thrown off in

¹ 1 Cor. i. 5.

² Prov. xxi. 16.

larger quantity, by the more impetuous current of the blood ; and the greater rapidity of digestion demands a more rapid supply of provision ; so that hunger and thirst soon become more craving and intolerable in them, than in others. Hagar, therefore, might have held on her way a little longer, had not Ishmael failed and fainted. Her deep affection led her to place him under the shadow of the shrubs around, that he might at least die in some little shelter from the fierceness of the sun. She went to a little distance, that her heart's wretchedness might not swell into a still more utter and intolerable woe, by witnessing the death-agony, which she could neither avert nor assuage. She said, "*Let me not see the child die.*" "*And she sat over against him, and lifted up her voice and wept.*"¹ Was her cry addressed to God, in the fervent language of wrestling prayer ? Did she remember the mighty hand, that had once already delivered her from similar misery and similar death ? Did she call to mind the sure promise of God, that her son, then unborn, should become a great nation ? The Holy Spirit is silent here ; and we can only hope and judge with charity upon her case.

¹ Gen. xxi. 16.

Whither shall a parent flee,—towards what point shall a parent's voice of earnest, fervent, agonizing prayer be directed, except to the city of refuge, the Lamb in the midst of the throne, accessible from every quarter, and with opened ear, with infinite tenderness of love, more ready to hear, than his most afflicted, most destitute supplicants are eager to prove his grace? So the Shunamite pleaded with God's prophet for her son; and he was awakened from the slumber of the dead. So the Syrophœnician clung to Christ for her child, and she was healed. So Jairus besought the Saviour for his daughter, and she lived. So Mary and Martha clung to Christ, as the Resurrection and the Life; and their brother Lazarus came forth from his four days' sojourn in the prison-house of the grave. It is God's own invitation, "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble*"—it is the promise of God's own unchangeable truth, "*So will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise Me.*"¹ If the invitation be obeyed, the truth of the assurance shall be amply vindicated; whether the solicitude be personal or parental. Alas, how fearfully does

¹ Psalm l. 15.

unbelief put back the hand, and distrust the engagements of the Most High! We give Him credit for past mercies; we acknowledge past deliverance; but we cannot or will not be persuaded, that He is equal to any, and every emergency, wherein his providence, whether directive or permissive, hath placed us. "*He smote the stony rock indeed, that the waters gushed forth, and the streams flowed without a but can He give bread also, or provide flesh for this people?*"¹ He can do all this, and infinitely beyond it. He is able to do exceedingly abundantly, above all that we can ask or think: and it is our chief misery, that in all our other miseries, we do not remember his faithful love, and take refuge by prayer in the sanctuary of his power, through the undrawn veil Jesus Christ.

Turn we then to notice

III. GOD'S DEALING WITH HAGAR AND ISHMAEL.

He heard the voice of the lad; whether merely the expression of bodily suffering, the outbreathing of a fear to die, or a gracious and far higher impulse, in the cry for mercy to God,

¹ Psalm lxxviii. 20.

whose worship had been dishonoured, whose covenant had been despised, and whose promises had been mocked by him, in the day of worldly ease and prosperity; but whom he now remembered in the bitterness and anguish of his soul. We will hope the last. God heard him, as the father ran to his prodigal son, relieved his want, snatched him from death; and gave him an undeniable pledge of that good will, and those promises, which were yet laid up in store for him. "*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget, yet will not I forget thee?*" saith the Lord of Hosts."¹ Christian wanderer in the wilderness, "*there hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear; but will, with the temptation also make a way for you to escape, that you may be able to bear it.*"²

Our very sorrows often blind us to the remedy which lies at the door, awaiting only the eye of faith to see it, and the hand of faith to possess it. "Behold," saith mourning Job,

¹ Isaiah xlix. 15.

² 1 Cor. x. 13.

"I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him:" But then the holy faith of Job adds, *"He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."*¹ In this sadness of spirit the disciples contemplated the approaching departure of their Lord: and sorrow so filled their hearts, that they could not embrace the promised joys of the Comforter, whom He had engaged to send unto them. In this blindness of calamity, when Moses spake of deliverance to the children of Israel, "they hearkened not unto him, for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage."

In this dimness of wretchedness, Hagar saw not the well, which held its life-giving water, although it lay very near, soliciting, as it were, her regard and approach. It might indeed be that God had withheld her from beholding it; as the Saviour held the eyes of his two disciples; in order that they should not recognise Him, until, in sovereign pity and love, He

¹ Job xxiii. 9—10.

those to make Himself known in the breaking of bread. And thus the worst extremities of his servants become to Him revenues of glory, by his unexpected and un hoped for interferences to deliver them. His word was pledged, his promise given: heaven and earth might pass away, but that word could not pass away, that promise could not be repealed nor withdrawn. "*Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord,*" said David, "*Lord, hear my voice:*"¹ and it did enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Jonah cried unto him out of the belly of hell; and came again into the land of the living, though the earth with her bars was about him. His soul fainted within him, yet he remembered the Lord; his prayer came unto Jehovah, even into his holy temple: and then a blessed experience of ready love was compelled to confess, "*Thou hast brought up my life from corruption, O Lord, my God.*"² Ishmael is no longer in Abraham's house; but not beyond the reach of Abraham's Almighty helper. He is saved because of Abraham, and the promise made to Abraham's faith.

And how was the deliverance effected? The

¹ Psalm cxxx. 1.

² Jonah ii. 6.

Angel of the Lord, the Angel Jehovah,—no created messenger, but the Almighty Messenger of the everlasting covenant, interfered to save Abraham's son. He unto whom, even then, in the counsels of eternal love and wisdom, all power, both in heaven and earth, both in providence and grace was given, undertook and accomplished this rescue from death: a gracious emblem of that almighty rescue, which his cross and righteousness effect from the terrors of the second and eternal death, in those who seek his mercy. The language of Scripture appears plain and positive, in testimony of the divine character of this Messenger. The promise of Jehovah is renewed, "Arise, lift up the lad and hold him in thine hand, for I, (I myself, and not another,) will make him a great nation." What aileth thee then, sinful and mourning spirit, who art lost, wandering, exhausted, drooping, dying in the wilderness? What aileth thee? Fear not. Hast thou prayed, has thy heart sought the God of mercy, as He is ever present in his Son? Listen; for God's own Angel—the Angel of his presence, his might, his love, the Messenger of the covenant whom He delights in, addresses thee. Look unto Him, and be saved. "If

*wilt believe, all things are possible unto
that believeth."*

As Hagar saw not the well, until God
opened her eyes, and as then, and not till then,
he went, and filled the bottle with water,
and gave the lad drink," so must the power of
God in Christ Jesus, attend his promise and
all. The command is given, "Stretch
the withered hand:" but Almighty power
gives the ability, before the sufferer can
hold it forth, and have it restored whole
and sound. But where the promise is re-
posed in faith, which still God gives, there the
power is never absent. "*Said I not unto thee,
that thou wouldst believe, thou shouldest see the
signs of God?*"² O fainting spirits! there is a
way opened in Christ Jesus, for sin and
uncleanness. There is a voice of love from
the Word and the Holy Ghost to cry, "*Who-
ever will, let him take of the water of life
freely.*"³ Beg of God to open your eyes that
they may see it. Beseech Him to bring it to you
by the hands of his ministers—of your mother
Church; and drink, and live for ever.
God was with the lad; and he grew, and

¹ Mark ix. 23.

² John xi. 40.

³ Rev. xxii. 17.

dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer." His mother seems henceforth to have laid hold of the promise made in her son's favour, and to have watched over him accordingly.

Were it thus in the experience of parental faith,—did parental love rest on the promises made to parental trust, and that trust in lively exercise,—were God's exceeding great and precious undertakings on behalf of parents more closely regarded, what blessed effect would follow such simplicity of hold on God as a ground and motive for diligent, prayerful, instruction and example! Many would be the children, now perishing in a spiritual wilderness, for lack of the wells of salvation, restored to life and blessedness: and many would be the outpourings of parental joy, "*This my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost, and is found.*"¹

¹ Luke xv. 32.

SERMON XXXII.

THE BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE OF CONSISTENT RELIGION.

GENESIS XXI. 22—25.

AND IT CAME TO PASS AT THAT TIME, THAT ABIMELECH AND PHICOL THE CHIEF CAPTAIN OF HIS HOST SPAKE UNTO ABRAHAM, SAYING, GOD IS WITH THEE IN ALL THAT THOU DOEST. NOW THEREFORE SWEAR UNTO ME HERE BY GOD, THAT THOU WILT NOT DEAL FALSELY WITH ME, NOR WITH MY SON, NOR WITH MY SON'S SON: BUT ACCORDING TO THE KINDNESS THAT I HAVE DONE UNTO THEE, THOU SHALT DO UNTO ME, AND TO THE LAND WHEREIN THOU HAST SOJOURNED. AND ABRAHAM SAID, I WILL SWEAR. AND ABRAHAM REPROVED ABIMELECH BECAUSE OF A WELL OF WATER, WHICH ABIMELECH'S SERVANTS HAD VIOLENTLY TAKEN AWAY.

A GREAT man has been described as one who can embrace the highest, or condescend to the least important matters, with equal competence and grace. The definition will apply exactly to a man of true religion. As that Almighty Father, whose he is and whom he serves in the Gospel of his Son, not only directs

the harmonies of the mightiest worlds, but arranges the meanest atoms in his creation, with the same ease,—so his renewed children, animated by his Spirit, and governed by his mind, remembering that they serve the Lord Christ, endeavour with equal readiness to adorn the doctrine of their Saviour in all things. With them religion is not a matter to be brought out only on high and momentous emergencies while the general current of life is regulated merely by ordinary and earthly motives; but whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, they do all to the glory of God. The love of Christ constraineth them; they discern Him and their relation to Him, in every imaginable circumstance of life: and therefore they have one elastic impulse, capable of reaching the greatest obligations, or contracting itself to unfold and beautify the meanest station, or to the most common duties of life. They can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth them.

In this spirit, we have lately seen Abraham acting in the private concerns of family duty and trial. In the history now before us, commencing with the text and ending with the chapter, the divine record brings him under

our notice, exhibiting the same simplicity and godly sincerity in his transactions with a king who sought his friendship, and it might almost be added, his protection. There is equal consistency, the consistency of holy faith, that best and most blessed safeguard of the soul, in both situations. We may therefore hope, in prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit, to draw some profitable lessons for our instruction, by considering

I. THE TENDENCY OF HOLY CONSISTENCY IN A BELIEVER'S CONVERSATION TO HONOUR GOD, BY ITS BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE UPON OTHERS.

That great Apostle who hath left to the Church a summary of the everlasting Gospel, in the emphatic words, "*Ye are not your own, but bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's,*"¹ hath enjoined the disciples of his Lord, as one mean of advancing this high end and aim, "*to walk in wisdom towards those who are without.*"² But this is a portion of God's requirements at his children's hand, often ill understood, and consequently very imperfectly

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

² Col. iv. 5.

practised. We are too negligent of the duty imposed upon us,—that of making the truth of salvation, and the service of Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as attractive and beautiful as possible in the eyes of those who have not yet tasted that the Lord is gracious, or who are only feebly disposed to follow Him, uncertain whether to go with Him steadfastly, like Ruth, or to kiss Him with outward reverence, and draw back again, like Orpah. We lack that glowing zeal for his honour, that one overmastering affection of love and gratitude towards his Person, that all-presiding sense of everlasting obligation to his cross and passion, that transcendant esteem for the excellences of his character, that ever present sense of the felicities of his service, and that deep abiding tenderness for the souls of men, which, regard Him as the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, and the only hope of life and mercy to endangered souls. We hold Him forth rather with confession than with that godly consistency of deed and conversation, that exhibition of Christian graces, that adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, which is often the most eloquent and effectual appeal, that th-

living saint can make, to the heart of him who is yet dead in trespasses and sins, or of him, whose eyes are hardly opened by the Saviour's touch, and who yet sees men as trees walking. We too little regard, even though Christ be precious to us as believers, that the candle of God's life in the soul has not been lighted to be covered with a bushel, or set under a bed; but that it may not only be seen by our Lord's household the true and spiritual Church, but may pour some radiance through the windows into the outer darkness, where are so many wanderers; some of whom, attracted thither by its beauty and brightness, may knock at the door, have entrance administered unto them abundantly, and sit down in blessedness, at the marriage supper of the Lamb. We lack life, we lack desire, we lack vigilance, we lack prayer to fulfil the Saviour's command, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"¹ The influence of such a temper, wherein, I repeat, the professed followers of the Redeemer, are so mournfully deficient, is exhibited in the history under consideration,—

¹ Matt. v. 16.

By Abimelech's opinion of Abraham, and conduct grounded on it. He came from Gerar of the Philistines to Beersheba, attended by Phicol the chief captain of his host, to make a solemn treaty with Abraham; not ignorant of Abraham's Almighty Friend and Portion. And upon what principle, by what inducement, under what strong impulse, that such an errand and such an object was his especial interest, his best advantage? Simply this—"God is with thee in all that thou doest." As though he had reasoned thus. I am aware of the promise made to Abraham of a son. I am aware that the son so promised, is the child of an amazing miracle. I am acquainted with his victory over the kings; with the prosperity wherein he abounds; with the steadfastness of his holy adherence to the worship of Jehovah. I see him protected, supplied, increased, blessed of that God whom he serves, and who is thus obviously his all-sufficient Portion. He then shall be *my* friend, who hath thus obviously God for *his* friend. In the same deep, abiding, influential persuasion, that the Most High had blessed David, did Jonathan adjure him, while yet Saul hunted him like a partridge on the mountains, saying, "*Thou shalt not only while*

*live, shew me the kindness of the Lord, that I be not: but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever. And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him as his own soul."*¹ Even Saul himself, long after the evil spirit held stern dominion over him, was so fully persuaded of David's happiness and future power as the favourite of heaven, that he asked and received a similar oath at his hand.² Ninety years afterwards, another Abimelech, and another Phicol, besought like covenant from Isaac, the son of the promise: and obtained it from that holy love which overlooked the transgression against him.

It might have been, that Abimelech did not specially love Abraham, but had heard that Isaac was allotted to him in virtue of a divine covenant. Some fear therefore might have haunted him, lest, when Abraham should be put into possession, whether immediately or more remotely, he himself, sovereign as he was, and his descendants would change places with the pilgrim and sojourner, and need protection at his hand, or at the hand of his children.

¹ 1 Sam. xx. 12, &c.

² Ibid. xxiv. 21, 22.

With Herod's dread therefore, lest God's incarnate Son, the new-born King of the Jews, might snatch the sceptre from his hand, but without Herod's deadly malignity of purpose, he sought to make Abraham his friend. Such at least was the unworthy fear of the second Abimelech and his people towards Isaac and his family of privilege and blessedness.¹

Be this surmise however just or unfounded; be it that Abimelech came in sincerity of heart, and with some spiritual motive to demand Abraham's friendship, and to secure it by the awful sanction of an oath, or, in something of Balak's mind when he so miserably overrated wicked Balaam's power to bless or ban, "*I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed;*"² we still discover the secret, but commanding influence exercised upon the minds of others, by simplicity and godly sincerity in the believer's walk; and the desire, felt or expressed, stifled or admitted, wrestled down or yielded unto, of being partaker of his privileges and happiness and religion. "*Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.*"³

Abraham is not here brought before our

¹ See Gen. xxvi.

² Numb. xx. 6.

³ Ibid. xxii. 10.

notice, as a mighty temporal prince, whose armies might command respect, and whose alliance it might be well to gain ;—not as a profound philosopher, whose wisdom might amaze or direct, mystify or instruct mankind ; not as a theoretical examiner into religious truth, whose systems and speculations might dazzle simpler minds ; but as the humble follower of Jehovah, as a man of practical holiness and piety, who daily and habitually walked with God. And every one who names the name of Jesus, as the refuge and rest of his soul,—every one whose spirit hath peace in the Atonement, hope in the Righteousness, and rejoicing in the finished Salvation of Immanuel, be the field of duty and observance which he occupies small or great, be the deposit into his stewardship one talent or ten, hath, like Abraham, the opportunity of becoming a blessing to others, and making them own, “ God is with thee.”

To persons beginning to inquire the way to Zion, who have learned that there is a reality of good and privilege, as well as of self-denial and needful duty in religion, the weight of consistent character on the part of those who are more mature and advanced in spiritual life, may be unspeakably momentous. It is a rally-

ing point in difficulty ; it is a standard set up by the Spirit of the Lord, when the enemy may be coming in like a flood. It resembles Abraham's altar in Canaan, a beacon-blaze of light from heaven, to point out a way of life and peace ; it is God's witness of his love, in exhibiting the beauty of holiness, that it may meekly and mildly win hearts to him. It is the call of Moses to Hobab, "*We are journeying towards the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you, come thou with us, and we will do thee good.*"¹ By the example of Christian life and conduct, the Holy Ghost not unfrequently takes of the things of Christ, and shews them to others. The believer is an epistle known and read of all men : and thousands, won by a beautiful exhibition of Christian graces in those who kept the noiseless tenor of their way, thinking themselves unobserved in their walk through the vale of humility, have taken hold as it were of their skirt, and cried, "*We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.*"² Thousands, I say, have so read that plain and intelligible epistle of practical holiness, illustrating purity of faith in the sons and

¹ Numb. x. 20.

² Zech. viii. 23.

daughters of the Lord Almighty, that seeing God with them of a truth, they have been overruled to cast in a lot with them, and glorify the common Saviour, in the day of their gracious visitation.

Even they whom the god of this world still holds in the fetters of unbelief, ignorance, prejudice, and hardness of heart, have been smitten between the joints of the harness, by such intelligible instances of the power of God—by such arrows from the quiver of practical holiness. They have often yielded homage, unwillingly wrung from them in the outset. They have often sought the patronage of men, whom once they openly professed to despise. They have often besought the prayers of those, whom they once stigmatized as visionary enthusiasts; and have felt not unwilling that their wants should be represented before the mercy seat of God, by lips which they once scorned as those of mere unmeaning babblers. The countenance, the advice, the assistance of the humblest followers of Jesus, have in instances more numerous than will ever be imagined, until the revelations of that day when the Light of the world shall come again in his glory, been anxiously sought; and the triumph of meek-

ness, purity, love, and that wisdom which the Holy Ghost teacheth, over the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God, has been complete. The bended knee in secret, the full heart's intercession in the privacy of the closet, the simplicity of a heavenly conversation, and of affections set on things above, tend to the same effect in a private Christian's pilgrimage that the beloved disciple had in view when he wrote his first epistle, that they into whose hands it came, might have fellowship with him, and with his brethren in the apostleship, whose communion was with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. It is not by curious and unprofitable speculation, by zeal for mere circumstantial, by doctrinal accuracy—the bones, and sinews, and flesh, and skin, of the everlasting gospel, without the breath and beauty of a living soul, infused into it by the Spirit of God, that men are won into the paths of salvation, when they look to find them in the examples of their neighbours. The gate that opens into this way of blessedness moves on other hinges. And what are they? Surely a constant and graceful conformity between profession and practice, in those who name the name of Jesus—a religion which exercises its mild, but unvarying and

supreme control, over all the secular, not less than the spiritual concerns of life—a religion which reconciles, and indeed combines the employment of Martha with the devotion of Mary.

Continuing our view of this portion of the divine word, we notice

II. THE HOLY SINCERITY OF A BELIEVER'S LOVE.

It is of all the graces that reflect the image of the Son of God in the heart of his disciple, the most watchful and unslumbering. It has its impulse from his power, its constant example from his walk ; it is, in short, the transfusion of his own mind into the mind of his followers and friends. And as the love of the believer's Prototype never failed, from his incarnation to his resurrection ; as it never will fail through all ages of the Church, in whose behalf He conducts unceasingly the gracious work of an intercessory priesthood, so is Christian love that grace, which they, who are as He was in the world, and who yearn to be like-minded with Him at the Father's right hand, delight to cultivate ; because it is not only a duty, but a privilege of their faith.

It is exhibited by Abraham

(1.) *In his readiness to take the oath required*

by *Abimelech*. The king said unto him, "Swear unto me here by God, that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear." Thus adjured, since the oath involved nothing unlawful,—since it would be for confirmation an end of all strife—since it would most amply give security to *Abimelech*, that one who entertained such awful views of the majesty and omniscience of Jehovah, as did his servant and friend, would never violate that oath, he scruples not to bind it upon his soul. It brought him into no bondage, connected him with no dangerous consequences, embarrassed him by no possibility of circumstances, wherein his obligations Godward might militate against his oath; as Herod's duty to Christ's messenger the Baptist placed him in irreconcilable contradiction with his rash vow to *Herodias*—and induced him to take refuge in murder, from what he deemed the disgraceful guilt of perjury. To Abraham the oath was unnecessary: but if it lulled the alarm of *Abimelech*, and gave him repose, it was expedient. It bound him to

nothing more than the civil obedience of a subject to his sovereign, whereof as a believer he felt the sacred obligation; and to the fulfilment of kindness, which the law of love, that glowed so warmly in his heart would make his delight. It was an act of holy courtesy and kindness thus to meet the wishes of Abimelech. He knew by that vision where the horror of great darkness fell upon him that his posterity would not inherit Canaan until four hundred years should pass away. He might therefore safely promise the king of Gerar, not to molest his descendants, even unto the third generation. He has a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man in this transaction; and it is done at once.

A confirmed Christian will often have to encounter the fears, or prejudices, the ignorance or suspicions of weaker brethren. Is he then sternly to take his ground of higher experience in the school of heavenly wisdom, and not to condescend to those of a lower form? Is he to measure every man by his own standard—to make his own opinions, like the tyrant's bed, upon which every wretch must be mutilated that he may fit it? Is he thus to lay a stumbling block in his weak brother's way, when

he might lend him a hand, blessed of God, to lead him onward to some acquaintance with his own better and clearer experience? Is he not called upon by that Master, whose example he must imitate, while he cleaves for salvation to his cross, to instruct others, as they are able to bear it; not to feed them with strong meat, while yet their spiritual digestion and power of spiritual assimilation can only enable them to use milk? If he would make the Gospel beautiful, and exhibit its spirit in a form as attractive, as it is intelligible, he is so commanded. When a professor of religion has outstripped Paul in the race after conformity with God, he may then hold the Apostle's conduct light and needless, "*I have become all things to all men, if that by any means I might win some*"¹—and that too without the compromise of any fraction of holy principle, however minute. The condescension of Christian love is irresistible. It was the mediatorial glory of the Eternal Word, that when "*He was rich He became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.*"² His meekness and lowliness, his patience and forbearance, his tender allowances to the carnal

¹ 1 Cor. x. 22.² 2 Cor. viii. 9.

views and misunderstandings of his disciples bowed and bound their hearts unto him. The same spirit, living and breathing in every page of his Gospel, hath won unnumbered hearts to his service. And they who would advance his gracious kingdom by instrumentally leading men to the glad obedience of faith, must walk in the holy readiness of love, even as He walked.

By some commentators, the oxen and sheep given to Abimelech are supposed to have been meant for sacrifice, when the covenant was stricken between them. Others imagine them to have been the ordinary gift on Abraham's part, wherewith even at this day in the East, parties begin their intercourse with a present, be it of dates or diamonds. A third class suppose them to have been set apart for an expression of homage paid to Abimelech as lord of the land. But why, it may be asked, upon the last supposition, does Abraham, who holds that lordship over the country, by God's own donation, (the highest and most unchallengeable of all tenures,) pay homage and tribute? Simply because the time of actual delivery was not yet come. Abraham was lord of the land in *hope*, but not in *possession*. Thus the Lord of the temple wrought a miracle to pay the half

shekel, while yet in very truth He was exempted by the highest of all exemptions from that liability. "*Render therefore to all their due, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.*"¹

The seven ewe lambs were undoubtedly meant as a price paid by Abraham to Abimelech for the well of water; in order that holding it thus from him, by a kind of feudal payment, he might in time to come have no dispute with the people, but possess and enjoy it by a tenure confessedly good and just in law.

But the holy sincerity of a believer's love is shewn by Abraham,—

(II.) *In the honesty of his reproof to Abimelech.*

"He rebuked him, (or reasoned with him,) because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away." As a solemn covenant was to be made between them, it was meet and right, that all causes of dispute and misunderstanding should be mentioned, corrected, and removed. It is the office of love—a needful though a painful office—an office

¹ Rom. xiii. 17.

of true tenderness, not to suffer sin upon our brother; but meekly, gently, and in something of that goodness which was continually poured forth from the full and fathomless depths of the Saviour's compassion, to reprove what we know to be amiss; what that modest charity which steps backwards, without looking backwards to throw its garment of pity over a brother's nakedness, yet feels needful to correct—"considering ourselves, lest we also should be tempted." Such a temper is widely different from that cynical tone of mind which makes so many who know not what spirit they are of, delight in the opportunities of fault-finding. It is as different indeed, as nature from grace, humility from pride, and the requirement of holy duty from the suggestions of self-complacency. Christian lowliness and modesty would shrink from the task of reproof, as one which may seem ungracious: but a sense of responsibility will not suffer the child of God to please himself and be silent. He will be gentle in the task, as a nurse with her children; but he will be firm in discharging an office which faithfulness to souls may impose upon him; as the surgeon mourns inwardly over the pain occasioned by his knife, but uses it steadily the while, con-

vinced of his patient's need, and of the benevolence of his own purpose.

1. Is it now asked to what principle (subordinate to the ruling power of faith) we may attribute these excellences in the character of Abraham? I answer, to that habitual connexion of every thing with God, which the last verse but one in the chapter records for our instruction. "*Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.*"¹ The worship of his Almighty Shield, his all-sufficient Helper, his exceeding great Reward is never forgotten. The grove is planted; and no doubt throws in due time its broad and refreshing shade over the altar, whereupon is shed that sacrificial blood, by which was shadowed forth the all-meritorious oblation of the Lamb of God. His religion is inseparably intertwined with the great doctrine of atonement, which is the groundwork of all prayer, all worship, all praise, all hope, all confidential approach to God. O let us not be told that we may preach that doctrine too frequently, or too anxiously, or too importunately to the hearts of men. If there be one

¹ Gen. xxi. 33.

truth of God, which more than another (where all are infinitely precious) should be inculcated in season and out of season, it is surely that great doctrine, the central sun that pours the light of life—the central force that preserves the harmony of the whole system of salvation, and around which every duty, every grace, every virtue that unites to complete and perfect the believer revolves at God's appointment. We do not mean that Christ crucified should be preached as an insulated truth; but as the mighty, supreme, and all-pervading influence that gives life and energy to man's obedience. And while according to his poor ability, helped, as the Spirit of God may help him by holy study in the book of life, prayer for divine illumination, and practical application of its blessed truth to his own soul, the minister of Christ endeavours to set forth the Atonement, in its length and breadth, and depth and height of love, and in its mighty cogency of obligation, he cannot do wrong, because he thus takes the motto of his great exemplar in ministerial zeal and faithfulness—“*God forbid that I should glory, save only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”¹

¹ Gal. vi. 14.

II. Abraham is a stranger and a pilgrim in the earth: but still he is permitted to sojourn in the land of the Philistines many days; probably indeed not less than six and twenty years. There shall be that truce to his present wanderings. And why? probably to refresh himself, to enable him to educate his son Isaac in holy preparation for the dew of heaven in the blessings of promise; and that he may awhile longer bear his testimony for God in the darkness of the country where he dwells. But his appointed time will pass away, his duties there will be fulfilled, and he must go thence. He knows this, and therefore dwells not in a ceiled house, but in a tent, easily taken down and removed. He rests awhile in faith; he is ready to depart in hope, for he relies on the promise, "*looking for a city which hath foundation, whose Builder and Maker is God.*"¹ Even so do Abraham's seed, the members and heritage of Christ. Having believed, they enter even here into some temporary rest. But as the ark had its staves always fixed in their rings, ready to be taken up, when the pillar of fire and of cloud should give its signal of removal, so is it with

¹ Heb. xi. 16.

the Christian. This is not his rest, for it is polluted; and the voice will come to cry, "Arise and depart hence." Zealous for his divine Master, while he stays, yet ready and willing to be gone, he redeems the time, and lives with his eye fixed on that unchanging blessedness which awaits him in the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. He knows that if his earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, he has a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Where his treasure is, there is his heart also. He is a brief sojourner on earth, a pilgrim, rapidly passing through its wilderness, or its more pleasant places; but his portion both for time and for eternity, is the everlasting God, upon whom he calls, even Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. "*To him to live is Christ, to die is gain.*"¹

¹ Phil. i. 21.

SERMON XXXIII.

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC.

GENESIS XXII. 1, 2

AND IT CAME TO PASS AFTER THESE THINGS, THAT GOD SO TEMPT ABRAHAM AND SAID UNTO HIM, ABRAHAM AND HE SAID. BEHOLD, HERE I AM. AND HE SAID, TAKE NOW THY SON, THINE ONLY SON ISAAC, WHOM THOU LOVEST, AND GET THEE INTO THE LAND OF MORIAN; AND OFFER HIM THERE FOR A BURNT-OFFERING, UPON ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS WHICH I WILL TELL THEE OF.

It has been remarked, not more quaintly than truly, that when man builds himself a nest, God in gracious wisdom plants a thorn in it, lest his shortsighted and unthinking creature, allured by its warmth and softness, should cover too closely in it, when he should be pluming and spreading his wings for a heavenward flight. The statement is verified in Abraham's experience. He had now dwelt in Beersheba many days, probably indeed until Isaac was twenty-five, or

some imagine, three and thirty years old ;¹ and had been taught by holy precept and example, to know the Lord God of his father. The one seems to have passed peacefully and happily away. Abraham had perhaps begun to settle down amidst his family endearments ; and therefore he must feel the sharpness of the sorrow, in order that he may not mistake his pilgrimage for his rest. “ *Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.*”² God had only one Son without sin : but even that eternally-beloved of his Father was not without a cross. The children of the Most High are indeed often nearest their hour of sorrow, when they least expect

“ *In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour, Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. Thou didst hide my face and I was troubled.*”³ The believer therefore, hath need to watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation : or, finding it overtake him, that he may have a resting place and comfort for his soul, a sanctuary provided by the

¹ Such is the opinion of the learned Lightfoot, who founds his proposition upon the type and antitype in respect of age, such a correspondence having been found to exist in so many other circumstances.

² Heb. xii. 6.

³ Ps. xxx. 6, 7.

God of peace, whither he may betake himself, as the manslayer to the city of refuge.

Instead however of following out the train of thought which these opening remarks suggest, the considerations may become more pointed and practical, by connecting them with this portion of Abraham's history, and noticing,

I. THE GREAT TRIAL OF THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL IN GOD'S COMMAND.

"It came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham." But have we not, it may be asked, in another portion of the Bible, (equally a revelation of truth by the Holy Ghost,) a special injunction, that "*no man should say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed?*"¹ Even so: and yet Abraham is tempted of God. And if in the unnumbered instances of human trial, it could be said of a saint of Jehovah, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation," that saint was Abraham. Temptation, in the simple meaning of the word, is trial, examination, proof, which may become

¹ James i. 12, 13.

the food or the poison, the exercise or the destruction of him whom it befalls. It may denote in the tempter, a malignant design of leading its object into sin, for the destruction of his soul; for which end the pure and holy God could never send it; else would He be the Author of sin, perfect, and sin-hating as He is, a contradiction monstrous and irreconcilable. It may be a trial commissioned by divine wisdom and love, to show unto man the principles of natural corruption on the one hand, and of divine grace on the other; both of which may need the hand of God, to reach their depths within the heart, and bring them to the surface, so that they may both appear to him who endures the trial. We know not the power and strength of God's Arm, nor the sufficiency of his Almighty and ever ready grace, until we compare our own weakness, with the overwhelming force of a stern and heavy trial. Nor until we measure our feebleness with the might of the giants that beset us, and feel that we are grasshoppers in our own sight, shall we flee to trust in the Lord for ever; thus learning, by gracious and happy experience, that in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. In such temptations, the immediate assault may come from

God, with a purpose in perfect harmony with the immensity of his gracious love, as it came to Abraham. In other cases the determination of his sovereignty may providentially make way for the assaults of Satan; as Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness, there to be tempted of the Devil. And why? simply that Satan's defeat, and Immanuel's victory might be made conspicuous by Him, "*who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*" Think it not strange" then, Christians, "*concerning the fiery trial that is to try you; as though some strange thing had happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall appear, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy,*"¹ In pursuing the subject, I notice,

(I.) THE CHARACTER OF THE TRIAL.

Every word of God's announcement, was to Abraham, like that sword which was in future time to pierce through Mary's heart, for the suffering, agony, and death of her Son, according to the flesh, her Lord and Saviour according to the covenant of grace. Every word was one of emphatic sorrow: and the

¹ 1 Peter iv. 12.

whole, to any other heart than one of faith, securely resting upon the truth of God, must have smitten it with exquisite misery. Take now *thy son*,—the son of thine *old age*,—the son of *God's especial miracle* to thee and Sarah,—thine *only Son*,—for Ishmael is cast out by a divine command, from being a posterity, according to the divine will, and Isaac alone remains,—thy son *whom thou lovest*, over whom thine heart yearns with undivided tenderness and affection,—and, (worst of all, to a believer in Jesus, in whose eye that child of promise was immeasurably dearer than he could be in connexion with any mere human feelings, however pure and deep their sources,) the son *through whom the world's Deliverer could be alone expected*: for if God were true, and Isaac died childless, it were utterly vain to expect the world's salvation. Jehovah, who had pledged Himself to effect human redemption by Isaac,—who had promised that he should be a principal link in the golden chain that connected Abraham with God manifested in the flesh, demanded the sacrifice. He then, to whom the promises were made,—he to whose heart those engagements were the deepest and holiest joy, was to undertake the terrible office

of this priesthood ; to get him into the land of Moriah, and with his own hand, to offer Isaac there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains of which God would give him notice. He who read and knew what was in the heart of man, was well aware that Abraham's faith might lay hold on God's Almightiness, or the requirement would have been impossible to flesh and blood. One lust may often strive against another in the human heart, and indeed in the heart of him who desires to perfect holiness in the fear of God. But in this dark and mysterious instance, one grace seems to be called into the lists against another,—the grace of *faith* in God's promise, is apparently armed against the grace of *obedience* to God's absolute command. And where shall the mediator in such a strife be found ? Whither shall Abraham look for that days-man who may lay his hand upon both, and reconcile them together. Yet surely, if the promise and the command do not meet together,—if the grace of faith, and the grace of obedience do not kiss each other, Abraham shall never see the day of the Son of man : nor shall God in human form and flesh purchase the Church with His own blood : nor shall the herald of

mercy point to Him, and say, "Behold the Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world!"

In the case of Ishmael, a valid reason was given why he should be removed from his father's house; but the Lord is absolutely silent why Isaac should be sacrificed, alleges no cause, promises no substitute, hints no hope that a ram shall be caught in the thicket, nor Jehovah be seen in the Mount for a rescue. The command is however absolute, and imperative. At the very moment when Abraham probably expected from the call of his Almighty Friend some new manifestation of divine love and goodness to himself and to his family, God sounds the depth, and measures the height, of his servant's devotedness, with a line and rule, such as had never yet been applied to human frailty, however mightily upheld of God, since man was made upon the earth. As we are carried down the tide of sacred history, we hear David's passionate grief for the loss of a rebellious child. Would it then be wonderful, if in circumstances of immeasurably greater sorrow—called to sacrifice the delight of his eyes, the hope of his age, the promise of a universal and everlasting blessedness to lost mankind,—

Abraham, instead of obeying the command, should go forth weeping, and say, as he goes, 'O my son Isaac, my son, my son Isaac, would God I could die for thee, O Isaac, my son, my son!'

If Abraham had closed the ear of faith, and listened only with that of sense, (for both can by no possibility be opened together) when God delivered this message, reasons why it should not be obeyed would have occurred to him with irresistible power. He might have answered, (and the reply would have found an echo in every man's natural wisdom and natural affections,) "such a command is utterly impossible to be regarded: it would be a sin against humanity, nay, it would be foul and flagrant dishonour to God, should I obey it. There is a positive canon of the Most High Himself against it—" *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.*"¹ The friend of Jehovah therefore, cannot be called forth to become the murderer of his own son. I am here a witness for God, for the truth and beauty of his religion; for the pure and holy morality of his faith—for the blameless life of one who

¹ Gen. ix. 6.

fesses to have received the Atonement. I will therefore tremendously compromise the honour of my Lord, by lifting a hand against the life of my child. I shall bring an eternal reproach upon myself and Him; and make religion an utter abomination in the sight of the heathen. Isaac is not mine alone, but Sarah's; her life is bound up in the life of the lad. I will die with horror at such an act. She will detest the unfeeling husband, the unnatural father; and I shall bring down her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. This sacrifice would nullify all that hath been promised; and make the God of truth Himself a liar. *How then can I do this great wickedness and against God?"*¹ Surely either this command is a delusion, or the very engagements of God, whereon my hopes, and his honour are built, must be as fleeting as the morning dew or the early dew, instead of being unchangeable and imperishable as Himself." Thus Abraham might have reasoned: thus every man who consults with flesh and blood, instead of taking counsel from God, must reason. And thus multitudes at this day with God's

¹ Gen. xxxix. 9.

own message by his word in one scale, and the small dust of a miserable expediency in the other, regard the Bible as light and worthless. It is weighed in the balances of their infidelity, and found wanting.

No instance of resurrection from the dead had yet occurred upon earth. Might Abraham then hope, that if he slew his son, and consumed his ashes upon the altar, God would bring to pass a new thing in the world? But whatever tide of objection natural feelings might pour forth,—whatever armies of opposition, unbelief might muster,—whatever specious difficulties a man who chooses to sit in judgment upon a divine command, instead of beseeching God to subdue his heart to its obedience, might invent,—all are removed at once, like clouds of night before the rising sun, or as Satan fled from the Saviour's presence, when He foiled every temptation with that sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Abraham's lowly submission, is unalloyed with one repining exclamation. We know not indeed, that even a murmuring thought hath entrance and lodgment in his heart. If there were language at all, it was doubtless that used by his mysterious descendant, in the unimaginable agony of the

garden. *“Father, if this cup may not pass from Me except I drink it, thy will be done.”*¹

This trial was suited to the maturity of Abraham's experience in the divine life; and therefore was not laid upon him at an earlier period of his walk with God. There is love in the rod, love in the mode, and love in the time of its infliction. He who led not his people, newly brought from their bondage, by the way of the Philistines, though that was near, lest peradventure they should repent when they saw war, and return to Egypt, would not demand a sacrifice like this, until his servant was strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, until He had Himself taught his soldier's hands to war, and practised his fingers in the fight. The wheat can now abide the fan, and therefore may be laid upon the winnowing floor. Are any of you placed in the furnace; and doth the flame burn fiercely? Believe that God hath watched the fittest opportunity. Believe that if the temptation had come one moment earlier, it would have come too soon. Believe *“that the trial of your faith being much more precious than that of gold that perisheth,*

¹ Matt. xxvi. 42.

*though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the coming of Jesus Christ."*¹

There is no place for a moment's hesitation in Abraham's mind. The horror of great darkness that fell long ago upon him, had nothing so dreadful as this command, itself alone considered. But his feet are shod with the preparation of the peace of God, and impelled by love. He arose therefore, early in the morning to seek the appointed place, and do the mournful bidding of God. His heart is established, and does not shrink through the long trial of his three days journey. His resolution never falters, even when Isaac asks the heart-rending question, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering." The altar is built; the wood is laid in order; Isaac—the lamb whom Jehovah demanded is bound and cast upon it; and ever then there is no quailing, no pleading against the imminent act of sacrifice, against the uplifted stroke, that when it falls smites his child to death. Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. O blessed

¹ 1 Peter i. 7.

and Almighty power of God, at once to subdue, and uphold the tried and tempted soul! He walks in the furnace and treads its depth of flame unharmed; for the form of Him who walks with his saints is the form of the Son of God.

In this crisis of his fate, and of the fate of Isaac, we turn to notice

(II.) *Abraham's support under his most trying dispensation.* And be it remembered, that as no call upon our obedience more stern and fearful than this can be imagined, so we may be assured, that no similar strength and comfort will be denied to those who seek it in more common experiments of their faith. We have seen no resistance, heard no murmuring; every opposing feeling of his mind, and every struggling affection of his heart, however agonizing was the nature of the dispensation, is tranquillized, and lies slumbering, as calmly and placidly as an infant upon its mother's breast. Whence then is derived the mighty influence, whereby this victory has been won, and this full surrender made? This is the victory that overcometh all, even his faith. His name is high in the file of those honoured elders, who through faith obtained a good report of the

Holy Ghost. "*By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son; of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*"¹ Behold the mighty and unslumbering keeper of Abraham's peace, amidst every conflict; his support under the otherwise crushing weight of God's requirement; the high impulse which moved him to a sacrifice, otherwise impossible. In vain is every other pleading, in vain the apparent cruelty of the command, its apparent inconsistency with the character of God, and all the laws of duty. In vain would unbelief suggest the dark and dreary hopelessness of himself, his wife, and above all, of a lost world, if this sacrifice be consummated. Ishmael is gone, Isaac must die. Abraham may say, "*If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.*"² Even a world may perish, if Isaac die; and there is no light, especially enkindled for this emergency, to reach beyond his grave. Still, the bidding is positive, and Abraham is a

¹ Heb. xi. 17—19.

² Gen. xlii. 14.

believer. How is this? Faith is a long-sighted grace. Light cannot penetrate to the depths of the sea, and discover what is hidden there. It cannot discover what lies at the earth's centre. But faith can see God behind the darkest cloud. Faith can realize and rest upon divine assurances, when the means of their fulfilment seem impossible. It can hope against hope, for the birth of a child. It can believe against sense, when there seems no ray of light, that the child so wondrously born, and then so mysteriously demanded shall be spared. "The fig tree may not blossom, neither may fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no meat; the flocks may be cut off from the fold, and there may be no herd in the stalls:" but the tried believer, however great his exercise of faith hath still ground to "rejoice in the Lord, and to joy in the God of his salvation."

God has undertaken that Isaac shall have the promise and the promised Seed: and "*God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it: or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?*"¹ Isaac was born by

¹ Numb. xxiii. 19.

miracle; and if he dies, a miracle shall raise him again from the dead. The knife cannot slay him, the fire cannot consume him—the wind, scattering his ashes over the face of the earth, cannot carry him beyond the reviving power of Jehovah. Abraham therefore lays the truth and power of his covenant God to heart; opposes them, together with the promise resting upon them, to every reasoning of carnal unbelief; leaves his home, takes his son, journies towards Mount Moriah, and prepares unshrinkingly to perform an act of faith, such as the world had never seen; and such as (the consummation of that great sacrifice for transgression upon Calvary excepted) the world shall never see.

Mark the power of that faith in Abraham's address to the young men whom he left at the foot of the mountain. "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." Was this a pious fraud, to hinder their interference, against a purpose which to them must have appeared equally monstrous and unintelligible? No: it was the full expectation of a faith that towered upwards to the throne of God's Truth and Almightyness: and there learned, there accounted, decided,

the best and surest grounds, that "*God to raise Isaac from the dead, from so he had received him in a figure,*"¹ at : and whence also by a reception of : blessed figure, he was about to receive in, in his virtual resurrection. The e which once looked through a dead ow looks through a bleeding sword to r of God. "*He staggered not at the of God through unbelief; but was strong giving glory to God: being fully per- that what He had promised, He was to perform.*"² He knows, in his inmost there the Holy Ghost witnesses to the God) that he shall worship, that he re again with the lad to the young men. cies testify to present truth; experi- nbines with faith to attest the un- le fidelity of God: and Abraham hath not joy in believing. Such is the privi- every child of God. His faith may ond itself, beyond all opposition; be- combination of improbabilities, beyond objections which reason cannot answer, ngth repel: and be fixed upon Him

with whom all things are possible. And thrice blessed is he who can thus stay himself upon the promise and power of God. No valley of trouble will be to him without a door of hope; no barren wilderness without manna; no dry rock without water; no dungeon without light; no fiery trial without comfort: because he hath the same word, and the same God whereon to trust, whose power opened the sea, as a door to be a passage from Egypt to Canaan, who fed Israel in the desert with bread from heaven, and water from the rock; who filled Peter's prison with a flaming light, who made Shadrach, Mesech, and Abednego, to walk to and fro in the fiery furnace, with joy and safety.¹ Jesus said, "*Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*"²

In a world of conflict and unrest, while "without are fightings, and within are fears," it is among the dearest and most delightful refreshments of the heart to lay hold of that

¹ Spurstowe's *Wells of Salvation Opened*, p. 57.

² John xi. 39.

assurance, "*There hath no temptation befallen you, but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation also make a way for you to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"¹ The promise was verified in

(III.) *Abraham's deliverance and gracious reward.*

Abraham had stretched out his hand, and taken the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the Lord, Jehovah the everlasting Angel of the everlasting covenant, called unto him out of heaven, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." Did the omniscient God at this time first learn the purity and power of that living spring of faith which his own hand had opened in Abraham's heart, otherwise hard and flinty as the rock in Horeb? No—but this faith had now been proved; its blessed simplicity brought to the test; and the approbation awarded. God never accepted more than one human sacrifice

¹ 1 Cor. x. 13.

with blood; though He must have the thank-offering of every believer—the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, an unbloody oblation of gratitude to his grace. Abraham had only slain Isaac in his intention, not in reality: but he hath the praise of an actual accomplishment and consummation of that awful injunction. And now since Jehovah could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself—(an oath, whereby in the unimaginable condescension of his grace, He hath bound and engaged Himself also to the heirs of salvation—to every one of us instated into the family of life and love,) that by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie—his promise and his oath, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us. The blessing is not only confirmed, but enlarged: and every one of the spiritual seed of Abraham may realize it, hath realized it, and shall realize it for ever.

As this is the greatest, so it is the last of Abraham's trials. Except when Sarah descends into the grave, as a shock of corn ripe in its season, his old age is unmarked with further sorrow. The plowers plow no more upon his back, nor make long their furrows. His life

on in a calm tranquil current, until its
 ; when he may depart in peace, having
 with his eyes the salvation of God. The
 of affliction shall not injure the children of
 Highest, when they tread the furnace depths
 edience to his call, by faith in his name ;
 with one overruling desire for his glory.
 shall they always walk upon the fiery floor,
 e canopied with its flame, trying as it must
 hough powerless to harm them. The finger
 ine providence is already pointing to the
 of deliverance ; and the voice of the Great
 ; will ere long be heard, “ *Ye servants of
 Most High God, come forth, and come
 r.*”¹ Wherefore, comfort yourselves, my
 ted brethren in the faith and patience of
 Christ with these words.

Among the many inferences that crowd upon
 mind from this instructive part of the divine
 , one or two only must suffice.

*The absolute sovereignty of God over all
 we are, and all that we have.* Isaac is
 in an especial manner to Abraham to be
 rarest individual solace, and his highest joy
 ad of the faithful. Yet at the very moment

¹ Dan. iii. 26.

when every affection of his soul, short of that towards God, and even many of those affections whereby Isaac bound him to God, as the medium of a promised Saviour, were arrayed in opposition against the mysterious and terrible announcement, Isaac is suddenly and positively demanded. How may these things be? It is surely lawful for God to do what He will with his own. If we are his, not by creation merely, not merely may I add by the most precious purchase of his blood—but also by the glad and gracious surrender of our hearts to Him, under the summoning and subduing power of his almighty grace, He hath a Sovereign's and a Father's right over us and ours; over our temporal comforts, and our spiritual privilege. Our Isaacs may be precious to us, but they cannot be too precious to resign into his hands when He sees fit to claim them. "Lord, increase our faith;" that we may surrender them willingly, if Thou claim them. Lord, increase our faith, to say, Thy will be done. Lord, increase our faith to cry, "*The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; and blessed be the name of the Lord.*"¹

¹ Job i. 21.

But unto this magnanimity in the divine life there must be a gracious renewal of the mind unto holiness. The Saviour may issue the same command to the young man, and to the disciples, to forsake all and follow Him. To the one however, it will be intolerably irksome, to the other a comparatively easy yoke; because nature reigns in the former, and the grace of God hath dominion in the latter. Let God address an unconverted man, as He spake to Abraham, "Offer up now, not thy *son*, but thy *sin*, thy Herodias, thy Dalilah." Will he bind it, will he take the knife, will he slay it unshrinkingly? No he cannot spare it, he cannot part with it. "This is a hard saying, who can bear it?" But as He who spared not his own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will with Him freely give us all things, so He who has surrendered his heart to God hath nothing that he would keep back. "*Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee.*"¹

II. *The youthful Christian may be often a great and needful help to those of more advancement and maturity in religious experience.* Isaac was now arrived at the time of life when

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 25.

his bodily vigour must have made it impossible that Abraham could have bound him, laid him upon the altar, and slain him with the sacrificial knife against his will. But when God's demand, and Abraham's purpose were made known to him, did he resist, did he question, did he plead, did he endeavour to persuade? No: he sees God in the requirement by the same full assurance of faith, wherewith Abraham beheld Him; he clings by faith as closely to the promise in this dark hour, as did his stedfast father. He perhaps encourages his father, strengthens his hand, and nerves his heart. The sacrifice must be voluntary, if it be acceptable, and Isaac entreats Abraham to do, what Abraham would still have done, even if he had attempted to dissuade him. The confirmation of the patriarch's faith must have been thus vastly enlarged. And so may the trying path of elder disciples be smoothed, and their feet quickened in painful duties, when they see the grace of God in their juniors; see them rather beckoning onwards, than drawing backwards. It is a powerful, as well as a delightful call unto parental faith and obedience, when a gracious child leads the way in happy submission to the will of God; bears a father's or a mother's burdens of holy trial con-

cerning them, and animates a drooping father or mother to fight the good fight of faith, by his own modest, yet unshrinking courage in the conflict. May God give to every Christian parent, Abraham's faith ! And may the same God bestow upon every believing parent, Abraham's divinely courageous and devoted child !

III. I close the subject with a brief remark upon the *apparent discrepancy between St. Paul and St. James, partly in reference to this transaction*. The apostle of the Gentiles saith, *If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the Scripture ? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt : but to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness.*"¹ Abraham then is held as justified in God's eye freely, and without reference to his active obedience. The apostolic bishop of Jerusalem on the other hand asks, "*Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he*

¹ Rom. iv. 3—5.

*had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou, how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God."*¹ The appeal of James is made to those who quoted Abraham's privilege as a believer freely justified; but yet would not follow the example of Abraham, in the exercise of a faith evidencing and approving itself by sacrifices of holy obedience. His faith influenced his conduct and was connected with practical devotedness to God's will, in a circumstance of unexampled trial. His faith therefore was made perfect by works; as the goodness of a tree is not perfect, without bringing forth its appropriate fruit. In other words, the faith whereby Abraham was justified, when he believed God, was one which afterwards evidenced itself by works when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar.² "*Ye see then how that by works in this plain and simple sense of God's inspired word, a man is justified, and not by faith only. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*"³

¹ James ii. 21.

² Professor Scholefield's Sermon on St. Paul and St. James reconciled, p. 12.

³ Ibid. ii. 26.

SERMON XXXIV.

ABRAHAM A TYPE OF GOD THE FATHER.

ISAAC A TYPE OF GOD THE SON.

GENESIS XXII. 6—10.

AND ABRAHAM TOOK THE WOOD OF THE BURNT OFFERING, AND LAID IT UPON ISAAC HIS SON; AND HE TOOK THE FIRE IN HIS HAND, AND A KNIFE; AND THEY WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER. AND ISAAC SPAKE UNTO ABRAHAM HIS FATHER, AND SAID, MY FATHER: AND HE SAID, HERE AM I, MY SON. AND HE SAID, BEHOLD THE FIRE AND THE WOOD; BUT WHERE IS THE LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING? AND ABRAHAM SAID, MY SON, GOD WILL PROVIDE HIMSELF A LAMB FOR A BURNT OFFERING: SO THEY WENT BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER. AND THEY CAME TO THE PLACE WHICH GOD HAD TOLD THEM OF. AND ABRAHAM BUILT AN ALTAR THERE, AND LAID THE WOOD IN ORDER, AND BOUND ISAAC HIS SON, AND LAID HIM ON THE ALTAR UPON THE WOOD. AND ABRAHAM STRETCHED FORTH HIS HAND, AND TOOK THE KNIFE TO SLAY HIS SON.

A STUDENT of the Bible may be compared to a person travelling through a pleasant and fertile country. The wayfaring man follows a path abounding in every part with natural beauty,

well fitted to delight him, if he has an eye to discern, and a heart to feel it. But occasionally he is led up some gentle ascent, from which a scene of unexpected, and unusual loveliness or grandeur bursts upon his view, filling him with astonishment and gladness. The way of a diligent and devout reader of God's holy word, lies through a spiritual garden, wherein is every thing pleasant to the sight, and good for food, equally exciting and refreshing. But lest even this paradise might pall upon his mind by continued uniformity, he is frequently conducted by the sacred narrative, as the hand of the Spirit leads him along it, up to some high ground, commanding a vast and varied extent of gracious and glorious manifestation; more than usually radiant with the features of divine love; well fitted to raise his mind much nearer to heaven, and give it closer communion with God, in the everlasting mercies of his Son.

Of such kind is the history now under consideration. We passed through a region of no common interest, while journeying together over the various circumstances of Abraham's temptation, in that emphatic trial of his faith, which bade him take Isaac, and offer him for a burnt-offering unto God. And I must have failed in

ng, and you must have been wanting in
 nent, and all of us in a spirit of grace
 plication for holy teaching, if we passed
 ion uninstructed. Our way hath led us
 summit of Moriah. Upon that sacred
 in we are now standing. Look we then
 as God the Holy Ghost may enable us,
 e stupendous prospect that opens to us in
al View of the mysterious, and most sig-
transaction already reviewed. It pre-
 with two subjects especially demanding
 out contemplation : and if that contem-
 be blessed from on high to our hearts,
 l eagerly exclaim, as the love of Christ
 ns us all, ‘ What reward shall we ren-
 o the Lord for all the benefits that he
 ne unto us ? Lord, it is good for us to
 ,
 .

father and the son had each a part to
 in this figurative action, which has been
 ed for the instruction of the Church in
 of its militant state : and there is a very
 able, a very close, a very intimate simi-
 etween Abraham and Isaac, on the one
 nd the Eternal Father, and the Eternal
 nade flesh on the other, in the awful
 efore us. We regard then,

I. ABRAMAM'S CONDUCT, AS TYPIFYING
THAT OF JEHOVAH THE FATHER.

Many are the instances of holy faith and zealous love displayed by this friend of God: but none more remarkable, none more unquestionable, none that sprang from a deeper source, or rose to a higher point of devotion, than the offering of his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and who was the desire of his eyes. Long expected before he came, and cherished when he was given, in the patriarch's heart of hearts, connected with every desire, the chief substance of every earthly joy, so far as the creature could provide it; and mingling himself with every hope as Isaac did, Abraham lived again in his son, with a joy dearer and more pure, than can well be imagined. Parental love may realize a part of this affection: and doubtless the history of this trial has drawn forth tears of parental sympathy in more instances than may be numbered. But a child given by miracle, as well as taught and sanctified by the grace of God; a child in whom Abraham embraced every promise of individual and general blessedness, as the son of God's undertaking for man's redemption, had claims upon his affection, with which no other could compete, save those

upon her who bare and cherished the Lord of glory. Yet did the grace of God enable the patriarch to wrestle down all his affections, without one sinew that shrunk in the severe conflict; and to resign his son at a requisition, which, coming from any other quarter than the sovereign authority of Jehovah, could not have been entertained for a moment; but must have been rejected with undissembled disgust. Who shall doubt the sincerity of Abraham's holy fear? Who shall question the intensity of Abraham's love towards God? Both are unchangeable, He withheld not his son, his only son from the demand; and so doing, he stands alone in the history of man, as the universal deluge has no parallel in the history of the material world.

*“ But as a drop of water unto the sea, or as a gravel stone in comparison of the sand, so are a thousand years to the days of eternity.”*¹ Even such must be our estimate of Abraham's love towards God, in the resignation of his son to the divine will, compared with the immensity of God the Father's grace, in sending God the Son to become a man and a sacrifice. In

¹ Eccles. xviii. 10.

Abraham's case, we may discover a motive for this heroic act of self-denial. He owed every thing to God, both in possession, and in hope. He was bound to obey the divine will by obligations the most imperative, and by cords of the strongest love. But what could be an impulse in the mind of God, counselling, and as it were compelling Him, to bestow the Son of his affection upon the world? "*It is no pleasure to the Almighty that we are righteous, it is no gain to Him that we make our way perfect.*"¹ And if it were, the guilty alienated race of men neither does nor desires to do his will, nor advance his kingdom, nor promote his glory. Yet, although the Word was the Son of his everlasting regard and complacency, lying in his bosom from an eternal generation, the sharer of his counsels, the reflection of his glory, the fulness of his perfections, the cherished of his ineffable paternal tenderness, and with whom his complacency, his bliss, his every purpose, is, has been, and shall be inseparably united, He does not scruple to resign Him to the urgent want and craving requirement of a lost world.

¹ Job xxii. 2.

Abraham gave up Isaac to a constant and wearied Benefactor. The Father Everlasting signed his Son to a race of creatures continually gainsaying and disobedient. If the act of Abraham's piety was glorious, much more doth the act of divine philanthropy exceed glory. "*God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life.*"¹ "*Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some will even dare to die: but God commended his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*"² "*Herein then we love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*"³ Oh where, among the hearts of the children of men, shall we dig to open the sources of a love, which would be willing to blot obdurate enmity by sprinkling the affections of him who indulged it, with the blood of his child resigned to death, in order to save that provoked hater alive? Yet this hath been done by our Father which is in heaven, and done for us. "*O the depth of the riches both*

John iii. 16.

² Rom. v. 7, 8.

³ 1 John ii. 2.

*of the wisdom and goodness of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"*¹ "*Bless the Lord, O our souls, and all that is within us, bless his holy name."*² "*Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."*³ These things the angels desire to look into; and they will be the song, and the rapture, and the wonder of the glorified, through never ending ages of light, and love, and blessedness. Did every natural affection of Abraham rise up in opposition to the demand of Isaac's oblation; and need some presiding impulse to wrestle with and subdue it? And may we not with reverence, speaking after the manner of men, imagine something as it were of a sacred reluctance on the part of God's paternal love, to dismiss his Son from an untainted sphere of bliss and glory, to a tabernacle of flesh, to an incarnation of suffering, to a death of shame and agony? Yet almighty grace, the grace of compassion and love overcame all; and made God delight himself in this astounding sacrifice. In this view, one reason why the Most High expressed his strong approbation of Abraham's holy surrender, might be its faint reflection and

¹ Rom. xi. 33.² Psalm ciii. 1.³ 2 Cor. ix. 14.

resemblance of his own infinitely higher and more precious act of condescending and unmerited tenderness.

When Isaac saw the preparations for sacrifice, he cried, "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" For Isaac was also a believer in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Abraham knew full well where it was to be found—that it was the one only lamb of his own fold, and of his own bosom: and he was fully prepared to consummate the sacrifice. "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering." The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ had no need to lock the same secret in his heart. He took counsel concerning it with His Son. The question was put, "*Whom shall we send, and who will go for us,*"¹ to redeem a guilty and ruined world? And the answer was given by the Son Himself. The Lamb was not far to seek: for He stood at the Father's right hand, lay in his bosom, shared all its secrets: and from thence He cried, "*Here am I, send me.*"²

Abraham and Isaac went both of them to-

¹ Isaiah vi. 8.

² Ibid.

gether towards the appointed place of sacrifice. And is this apparently barren and indifferent passage a stony rock, out of which no honey can be extracted? Assuredly not. "As God the Father and Son, are never separated in their operations, so neither is the divine justice separated from the divine mercy. They go both of them together: both unite in this wonderful transaction of man's redemption. Believe we this, and we shall never despair: believe we this, and we shall never presume. Go, believer, to the cross of Christ; there thou wilt find "*mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissing each other.*"¹

When Abraham's faith had been tested and purified in the furnace of this demand, the consummation of his sacrifice was spared. "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." But the Father of our Isaac, spared not thus either Himself or his son. "*It pleased the Lord to bruise Him.*"² "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son;" but he meditated

¹ Worgan on the Lessons, ii. 335. Psalm lxxxv. 10.

² Isaiah liii. 10.

low was staid by the mightier hand of the angel Jehovah. Not so, when the Father cried, *Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow.*"¹ No ram as caught in a thicket to be a substitute: for the Lamb of God had not died, the world had been lost for ever. Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel were gathered together to perform the act of sacrifice; but God's hand and counsel had before determined to be made. It was this relative position of the Father towards Him, as a Sentencer and Judge, more than the scourge, or the crown of thorns, or the nails, or the soldier's spear, or the Roman cross, that made the Redeemer's soul sorrowful unto death. A higher hand than might be put back, executing a deeper counsel of love than man might be understood, brought the unsinning spirit of our Immanuel to more bitterness, than all the sufferings which the vials of human wrath could pour upon his body.

Abraham rejoiced to see the day of the Son of man, and he saw it, and was glad. At what time was this amazing manifestation vouchsafed to the delighted eye of his faith and love? He

¹ Zech. xiii. 7.

saw it in the spirit of prophecy, gleaming through the distance of nineteen hundred years. He saw it in the surety of the promise. He saw it in the person of Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God, King of righteousness and King of peace. But he saw it especially on Mount Moriah. The day of Christ is eminently the day of his *crucifixion*, when by one offering He perfected for ever them that are sanctified; when He was wounded for our transgressions; when He was bruised for our iniquities; when the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and when with His stripes we were healed. The day of Christ was also eminently the day of his *resurrection*, when having descended into the grave He arose again as our Surety, carrying the gates and the bars of his prison with Him, as Sampson those of Gaza, where he had been shut in. With a far clearer eye, looking through his own determinate counsel and foreknowledge, did God the Father see and rejoice in the day of the Son of man. He saw it in those prophecies, which his own unerring Spirit uttered. He saw it in those promises, which his own truth proclaimed and assured. He saw it in the day of Christ's incarnation; and He saw it when the cross

slew Him, when the grave received Him; and when He came forth from his prison house to the life and glory of an endless resurrection. In all these regards, and many more, the Father saw the day of the Son of man and was glad. In all these regards, in the day of his ascension, in the day of his Spirit's effusion over the heart; in the day of his manifestation in the mightiness of life and salvation to the soul, in the day of his union to the Christian—in the day of his near and endearing fellowship, that favoured believer sees the day of the Son of man. And though now he sees Him not with a bodily eye, yet believing on Him he rejoices with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.¹ O bend the eye of your faith upon these gracious and glorious visions of redeeming love, ye to whom He who displays it is precious: and *“beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*²

Having glanced at Abraham as a type of God the Father in this great transaction, its spiritual contemplation requires us to notice—

¹ By every spiritual child of Abraham, as by the father of the faithful himself, Jehovah is seen in the mount.

² 2 Cor. iii. 18.

II. ISAAC AS A MOST REMARKABLE TYPE OF GOD THE SON.

If Abraham represented the Paternal Deity who freely bestows his Son to death for the redemption of mankind, Isaac represented the Filial Deity who voluntarily submits to death, that so He may reconcile a world of sinners to their offended Creator, Sovereign, and Judge. The precise nature of the relation which God the Son bears to God the Father lies far beyond the limits of human comprehension : but this at least is unequivocally set forth by the terms Father and Son ; that they partake of a common nature ; that they are persons of the same order. Hence, in this typical representation, their characters are sustained by a parent and his offspring, rather than by any other persons ; that so we might learn the exact and absolute equality of Jehovah, and the Messenger of Jehovah ; whatever federal difference there may be between them, as the sender and the sent, as the sovereign master and his righteous servant."¹ This typical resemblance then between the Son of God and the Son of Abraham, between Christ and Isaac will hold,

¹ Faber's *Hornet*, II. 310.

(I.) *With reference to the birth of each.* Both were attended with circumstances absolutely supernatural and miraculous. Abraham's body and Sarah's womb were alike dead; and when the angel foretold this glad event, the future mother was incredulous concerning the blessing, though God's truth was pledged to bestow it. Emmanuel, God with us, was born, not of the course of nature, nor of man, nor of blood. The Holy Ghost came upon the virgin, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her, when she deemed the amazing announcement impossible to be fulfilled. "How can this be?" Isaac was long promised, and was expected during five and twenty years: ¹ while not less than the long and wearying tide of four thousand years rolled over a succession of generations born, sinning, mourning, dying, and gathered to their dust, between the first promise of redemption to the fallen creature in Paradise, and the advent of God in our humanity to fulfil it. Ardently as Abraham might desire the birth of his son, the ancient saints who waited for the consolation of Israel as eagerly looked for it in the Messiah; while the Father's un-

¹ Biddulph's Theology of the Patriarchs, II. 234.

bounded love expected it in the fulness of time with infinite complacency. And as Abraham made Isaac's name the memorial of his joy, so did aged faithful Simeon, speaking as the voice of the universal Church in all time, cry, "*Lord now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;*"¹ thus echoing the song of angels, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace good will towards men.*"²

I said that both were children of promise, and Isaac evidently with relation to Christ; for the universal blessing which was to flow from Isaac, must necessarily be referred to Him who was to spring from Isaac's loins, in whom *alone* all the families of the earth are blessed. It was Abraham's joy that Isaac was born. It was the Father's joy of love to a lost world that the Eternal Son should enter it for its redemption. It is the deep and thankful joy of all among us, who, being Christ's, are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, that "*Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father,*

¹ Luke ii. 29, 30.

² Luke ii. 14.

the Prince of Peace."¹ Through Isaac, Abraham was the father of Israel after the flesh. Through his Incarnate Son, the Father of heaven is the parent of all his spiritual descendants. Israel had Isaac for an elder brother, and we have Christ. May the Spirit bear witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God; and if children then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ!

(II.) *The Typical Resemblance between the Son of Abraham and the Son of God also holds, with reference to the suffering and oblation of both.* Isaac was very early mocked and persecuted by his bond-brother Ishmael. The Philistines afterwards opposed him, and strove to hinder him from digging wells; until Jehovah made room for him, and overruled their enmity. The brethren of our Lord, bondmen in spirit, although nearly related to Him in the flesh reviled Him, and would not believe in Him. The nations both Jew and Gentile—they of his own house and lineage, not less than strangers, opposed Him sternly and maliciously, when He opened the wells and ordinances of his salvation amongst them. But amidst all the con-

¹ Isa. ix. 6.

indeed He hath
of our hearts—
his grace, and
guage which ha
ever will, let
*freely.”*¹

Abraham to
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himself had pointed out to Abraham by an
 express intimation? Moriah was a group of
 mountains, on one of which the Temple of
 Solomon, the place of sacrifice was built, and
 another, if not indeed the very same, stood
 a cross whereupon the Lord of glory died.
 The enthusiasm of travellers, poets, historians,
 philosophers has claimed respect, veneration,
 and almost idolatry, for places where those
 whom they regarded as among the great lights
 of humanity lived, died, or performed any of
 their great achievements. Jerusalem itself, the
 City of the Great King, hath been the centre of
 superstitious attraction. Countless pilgrims
 have resorted thither to worship, and millions
 of armed warriors have flocked in the blindest
 ignorance of duty to win back the Holy Sepul-
 chre from the followers of the false prophet into
 the custody of Christendom, and perished in
 their folly, before they could tread the sacred
 soil which had been marked by the footsteps of
 the Redeemer. But no spot of the earth's sur-
 face is dearer to the believer than that whereon
 the Lord was crucified, and where a lost and
 sentenced world, lying under the wrath and
 curse of God, was liberated from its miserable
 bondage, when his anointed Son exclaimed, "*It*

*is finished ; and bowed his head, and gave up the Ghost."*¹ The reverence for place however, is little, unless the heart can glow with grateful love for the deed ; love to the Father who gave his Son ; love to that Son, who freely gave Himself ; love to that Almighty Spirit of grace, who seals the common salvation upon the believer, enabling him to say of this adorable Saviour, "*He loved me, and gave Himself for me.*"² "*Bless Jehovah, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*"³

When parent and child had reached the place, whereof God had told Abraham, "he built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood." Whether the child of promise were twenty-five, or (as Dr. Lightfoot imagined) thirty-three years old, he had strength enough effectually to resist, or swiftness of foot effectually to escape from the hands of Abraham. But he was a son of faith, as of promise ; and therefore an obedient child, equally zealous with his father to have God's bidding accomplished, although it must be effected by his own violent death ; and by an apparent impossibility of fulfilling the divine engagements on his be-

¹ John xix. 30.

² Gal. ii. 20.

³ Psa. ciii. 1

half. He therefore submits his hands to the bonds, his body to the altar, his breast to the knife, not only without a murmur, but doubtless with the most entire acquiescence. He gave himself fully and with good will to have God's behest and bidding concerning him performed.

Behold, a gracious and most instructive type of Him, who possessed of Almighty power, "*was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not his mouth!*"¹ When his enemies came to apprehend Him in the garden, they fell as dead men to the earth, although He merely said I am He, and the slightest effort of his Almightiness accompanied the words. When sentenced to his death of shame and agony He could have cried to his Father who would presently have sent Him more than twelve legions of angels, each one of whom, armed with power unintelligible to us, could have swept his persecutors from the land of the living, as one of them passed through the camp of the Assyrians, and slew in a single night a hundred and fourscore and five thousand. But how then could the world's salvation have been wrought? To effect

¹ Isa. liii. 7.

this great work—impracticable to any other Redeemer than God with us, He gave Himself to suffering, agony, shame, death; and said concerning them all, "*I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea thy law is within my heart.*"¹ To have salvation provided at all, for so many sinners since the world's creation, and for such a crushing weight of guilt in each, is much:—to have it at such a price, is more:—to have that tremendous price so willingly paid by the Purchaser is most of all. Who shall tell the unsearchable riches of Christ? Who shall not love Him, who thus loved us?

The Angel Jehovah stops the hand of Abraham when outstretched to slay his son: but there is no arm to interfere between divine justice and the life of Christ. He Himself, who hath power to keep it, and power to lay it down, merely saith to his executioners, "If ye seek Me, let these my disciples go their way." They escape the glittering sword of justice. He is the Ram caught in the thicket, and offered up to die, the just for the unjust, that He might bring them unto God. Isaac's figurative death was the first representation of a *human sacrifice*.

¹ Psalm xl. 8.

Hitherto only the blood of bulls, and of goats, and of lambs, had stained the altars of vicarious Atonement. In this amazing act therefore, we have an especial emblem of Him and of his work, who said, "*Sacrifice and offering, and burnt offering for sin thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared Me,*"¹—a body like to that, in which the majesty, the justice, the holiness of God were outraged; and therefore a body, wherein the great propitiation for sin might be made, an everlasting righteousness brought in, and God enabled "*both to be just, and the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.*"² "*Unto Him then that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen.*"

(III.) *It remains that we notice the typical likeness between the Son of Abraham and the Son of God, in the VIRTUAL Resurrection of the one, and the ACTUAL Resurrection of the other. I say, the virtual resurrection of Isaac, because although offered up only in the unreserved intention of Abraham, he was accepted, as*

¹ Heb. x. 5.

² Rom. iii. 26.

³ Rev. i. 6.

if already slain, and as such the Holy Ghost testifies. "By faith, Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac, and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called.'" Blessed be God, who when there is a willing mind, accepteth, according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not! Blessed be God, who sought only one sacrifice of human life to Himself: and provided that lamb from his own mercy; so that the sacrifices of his redeemed and sanctified people might thenceforth be only thank-offerings of holiness and grace for ever! During the whole three days between God's command, and Abraham's obedience, on the way to Mount Moriah, Isaac was dead in his father's mind; and was so accounted of God, when he was declared to be raised from the dead in a figure.¹ The ram substituted for Isaac is the type of his resurrection: even as under the Law the bird whose wings were dipped in the blood of his

¹ A figure, or parable, is a simile in which one thing is compared with another. In this place the resurrection of Isaac, and that of Christ are things likened together. In Heb. ix. 9. the word is so used when the Mosaic tabernacle with its services is called a parable—that is a visible type, emblem, or figurative representation of the blessings of Christianity.—*Biddup's*, *ut supra*, II. 231.

slain fellow, and himself set free, was a type of the resurrection,—the bird which died being a type of Atonement. And no other could be appointed; because as no actual rising again was ordained to these shadows of good things, the great truth of a resurrection could only, in some such manner, be exhibited to the eye of faith, in connexion with the doctrine of vicarious propitiation. The Incarnate Son of God in like manner was three days in the power of death before his glorious resurrection discharged our debt, and raised us, together with Him. That resurrection was a greater miracle than if the whole race of Adam had been brought out of the grave in a moment. For He had the curse of God and of our sins laid upon Him; and, who could roll away this heavy stone from the door of the sepulchre, except He who had power to lay down his life, and power to take it again? Christ hath drunk of the brook in the way; therefore doth He lift up his head, even to the glory of a mediatorial kingdom. Isaac's virtual and parabolic resurrection enables him to become the progenitor of the promised Seed and of the world's Saviour. The actual and most glorious resurrection of our Lord from the grave, where He rested, after

live also." " *When
an offering for sin,
shall prolong his days;
The Lord shall prosper
him, and he shall be made willi
and more than the
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buried with Him
like as Christ was
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*Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again ; who is even at the right hand of God ; who also maketh intercession for us."*¹ Are we afflicted ? It is not the sword of the vindictive Judge, but the rod of a reconciled and tender Father that is upon us. Are we in fear of death ? Christ hath extracted its sting, and robbed the grave of its terrors. Do we dread the guilt of sin ? The sword of justice hath smitten our surety : and the resurrection hath opened his prison doors, to shew that his suretyship hath satisfied God, and we are safe. He died for our sins, and rose again for our justification. "*If ye have been risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.*"²

Is this the day of Christ ? Doth faith see it with gladness ? Let us rejoice in his *Person* ; for He is the glory of mankind, not less than of the Father. Let us rejoice in his *Death* ; for it is our death to the condemnation of sin. Let us rejoice in his *Life* ; for it is the principle, the support, the substance, of our own, which must be lived by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Let us

¹ Rom. viii. 33, 34.² Col. iii. 1.

rejoice in his *Love*; if we have sought Him and it by faith; for that Love is the mighty cause of all peace, all joy, all holiness, all hope, all grace, all glory, to the soul of man.

SERMON XXXV.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF SARAH.

GENESIS XXIII. 19.

D AFTER THIS, ABRAHAM BURIED SARAH HIS WIFE, IN THE
AVE OF THE FIELD OF MACHPELAH BEFORE MAMRE: THE
AME IS HEBRON IN THE LAND OF CANAAN.

was wisely as well as solemnly advised by
e king of Israel, “ *Whatsoever thine hand
deth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is
device, nor wisdom nor knowledge in the
ve, whither thou art hastening.*” There is
house appointed for all living—a place where
human travellers along this vale of tears,
all meet at last, whatever be the relative
gth of their journies. “ *All the days of
ethusaleh were nine hundred sixty and nine
rs : and he died.*” In whatever spirit we
y expect death, whether of nature which
y dread, or of faith which may welcome its

all men once to die: be
So teach us then, O
and truth, to numb
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Such a holy lesson
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will include,

I. THE DEATH

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and Gospel of Jesu
Holy Ghost declar
new Jerusalem. wh

of Christ and Mother of us all. She hath this honour, above all women, whose names are embalmed, and whose memories are fragrant in the book of God, that her age is recorded there : she was a hundred and twenty and seven years ; these were the years of the life of Sarah. Of her too it is first witnessed, that she was mourned and wept for. The type passed away, and well did tears and sorrow become its removal ; but the antitype, the Church of God, remains, undying as Himself, who is its everlasting Life, and who hath promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Eve, the natural mother of all natural life in man,—Sarah, the spiritual mother of all gracious being—are gathered to their dust. All bodies of mankind shall sleep with the former ; all bodies and souls of God's renewed family, born to Him of the Church, shall have a resting-place of hope with the latter.

The preceding chapter gave us tidings of Rebekah,—that so the friend of God might haply see in the spirit of prophecy, another hope about to arise in his family, of perpetuity to the Church ; and to give continued promise of the appointed Saviour, before that brightness of Sarah's life, which had so long gilded

and gladdened his faith, was to be quenched in the night and darkness of the grave. A believer's best earthly sources of comfort may be removed; but faith and hope will be gifted with a purged and purified vision, to look for more; until every spring of trial shall be dried up, and every fountain of tears closed in the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

Sarah had been a fellow sojourner in Canaan with Abraham, above sixty years; sharing his faith, soothing his cares, upholding him in his path, and bearing his burdens. The Apostle Peter testifies of her submissive obedience to her earthly head, even as the Church is graciously and gladly subject to her glorified Husband Jesus Christ. But the separation must now be made. Long endearment, long intercourse, long communion of love, must have almost bound up Abraham's life in the life of Sarah; as ever happens to those, who, drawn together by the most endearing ties of earthly tenderness, have also a common fellowship with the Lord, as members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Deepened however, as that love was by time, and consecrated by the grace of God, its happy intercourse must be suspended. Sarah must die, and Abraham must

wait a little longer, until his own change come, and their dust may be mingled together. And surely, next to the hallowed links wherewith redeeming love binds the believer to the invisible world, there are none more dear than those cast around him, by the death of such as have been to him as his own soul. My smitten friends and brethren in Christ Jesus, pray for faith in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, that He may enable you, in full assurance of hope, to look beyond the veil, upon their estate of blessedness. “*Be followers of them, who through faith and patience have inherited the promises.*”¹ Tread in the footsteps of the flock; and although they cannot return to you, yet in a little time you shall go to them: and “*when Christ who is your life shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory.*”² The tongue that never addressed you, except with the tone and accents of love, is silent. The eyes that never followed you, save with anxious affection, are closed in death. The hands that laboured with delight to serve you,—the heart, upon which, next to God’s supreme dominion over its affections, you were en-

¹ Heb. vi. 12.² Col. iii. 4.

throned, is now mingled with the dust. The form, in which you once delighted, bears now the impress of the great destroyer. It says to corruption, "*Thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister;*"¹ and dear, unspeakably dear as the departed was to you, nothing now remains, but that you bury your dead out of your sight.

It seemed not good unto the Holy Ghost, to tell the Church of God whether Sarah's death was that of calmness and peace, or the joy and triumph of an assured faith,—whether it was one of strife with the enemy of souls, or of victory over him, sensibly achieved, in the last conflict,—whether she dreaded his approach, or could say, in language like to Simeon's, when he held the world's Saviour in his arms, and felt the gladdening sense of redemption warm at his heart, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*"² We know not whether she was permitted to glorify the God of her mercies,—to praise Him for a conscious interest in his everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: and to say unto

Job xvii. 14.

² Luke ii. 29, 30.

the partner of her long, eventful life, "Come hither, and I will tell you what God hath done for my soul." But this we do know, and let it suffice; she *lived* in the faith, and she *died* in the faith, of Jesus Christ.

Believers, when they stand around the bed of a dying relative, often indulge a morbid anxiety for the amplest testimony to the sweetness of the promises, the faithfulness of God, and the soul's high consciousness of its Redeemer's presence, filling it with triumph. Assuredly such a witness, like that of dying Joshua to the tribes of Israel, a glad and grateful acknowledgment, like that of the Psalmist, "*My heart and my flesh fail; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever;*"¹ a joy like this unspeakable and full of glory, that makes the chamber of death fragrant with the name of Jesus, as ointment poured forth, lifts the hearts of surrounding mourners above their heaviest grief, and brings the Comforter indeed among them, with some of his dearest consolations. It enables them to join the song of high assurance, and to cry, "*O death where is thy sting; O grave, where is thy*

¹ Psalm liii. 26.

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bliss beyond it.
the closing scene,
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from their labou
them.*” ²

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of such removal to their hearts. Here then the father of the faithful, the friend of God, will be unto us an illustrious object for imitation. I notice therefore,

II. ABRAHAM'S CONDUCT IN THIS AFFLICTION.

I know not where even in Scripture,—that rich treasure-house of gracious and exalted examples of the power of faith, a more simple, a more exquisitely beautiful instance can be found, of a conscientious discharge of the duties arising out of affliction, than this of Abraham. If we be Christ's, and therefore Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, we shall ask of God strength and grace to walk, even as he walked, in this dark hour of his providential sorrow.

(1.) *View him then as a bereaved husband.*

Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. Some have imagined that he kept his flocks and herds in Beersheba, while Sarah remained at Hebron; and that hearing how God had smitten him, he passed quickly thither. Others with more reason suppose, that he merely came from his own tent into that where his dead now lay. That Sarah had a separate tent is unquestionable. And to adduce

no other proof, Isaac brought his bride Rebekah into his mother's tent, where she became his wife, and where he was comforted in her love after his mother's death.¹ Abraham's grief was not a transient sorrow, where the eye is not affected from the heart, where the tear is forgotten as soon as shed, and the soul returns to its unhallowed rest of indifference. It was a sincere, a gracious and a godly mourning, wherein nature wept, while faith was glad. This full and firm believer in God's sure word of promise, was a man of like passions with ourselves; and it is no act of that grace of God which bringeth salvation, (and of which it is the high office to mould the Christian's mind into the divine image,) to forbid that we should mourn, when the fondest objects of our attachment are removed by death. 'The body of a dear friend must be watered with tears, when it is sown in corruption.' He hath a proud stoic's, and not a meek Christian's heart, who can see unmoved the bed where the departed lay, the table where she sat, the garden where she walked, the books, and especially the book of God wherein she read, the objects of her Christian bounty,

¹ Gen. xxiv. 67. See also xviii. 6.

the children whom she taught, and the destitute whom she relieved, the place in the sanctuary where she prayed, or the cushion whereon she knelt, when her soul rose up to God in the yearnings and wrestlings of closet supplication. We have the best and highest examples of holiness, in justification of such grief. They were devout men, who carried Stephen to his burial; yet they wept and made great lamentation. When Peter was come into the chamber of Dorcas, all the holy widows stood by him, weeping and shewing her labours of love for the poor members of the Redeemer's Church. Martha and Mary bewailed the brother whom Jesus loved. Nay, He who was at once perfect God, and perfect man, wept also at the grave of his departed friend.

But holy grief must have its measure, while it has its way. The stream must not overflow its banks, wherein God hath appointed it to run. The weeping must not be immoderate, lest it might even seem as though the wisdom that ordained, and the hand of love that struck the blow, were not forgiven by the sufferer thus refusing to be comforted, when God the Holy Ghost brought, and was ready to apply consolation and peace to the spirit in Christ Jesus.

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doth not intermeddle—a joy in Christ. “*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord.*”¹ And if the corpse of a dear friend hath power to draw, not only our hearts, but our feet, to the chamber where it lies, and to the grave where it mingles with the dust, how strongly should our hearts be attracted to that heavenly place, where He who died and was buried, and rose again, and ever lives and reigns, sitteth in his glory of grace, and liveth at the right hand of God. “*When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*”² There is his body, and there his soul, united to his glorious deity. Thither may the mourner flee, not to weep like Rachel, refusing to be comforted: for it is no place for a sorrow so unrestrained; but to rejoice in “*Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever;*”³ and more and more to long after that glorious Epiphany, when He will come again, and receive his people to Himself, that where He is, there they may be also.

The indulgent love of Mary's friends mistook her errand, when they said, she goeth unto the

¹ Job i. 21.² Heb. xiii. 8.³ Ps. lxi. 2.

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before his dead."¹ He arose from the ground whereon he had been seated; as Job's friends sat down with him seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was very great: or as the Holy City is represented upon the medals of the Roman conquerors, sitting under her palm tree, and weeping her captivity. Other duties to the departed must take place, even of the sacredness and solitude of grief: and God is merciful to demand that so it should be; in order that necessity, if not will, may divert and perhaps diminish grief. Why seek ye always the living among the dead? And yet at the moment when Abraham stands up to make preparation for Sarah's burial, he calls her corpse *his* dead; to shew the dear communion yet existing between them, upon which the grave could make no inroad, and which could be carried onwards between one in the body, and the other quit of its tabernacle of clay in the invisible world.

But such fellowship between the embodied and disembodied spirits of Christ's true soldiers and servants is an act of holy faith. By this

¹ Gen. xxiii. 3.

grace only, the communion of saints with each other, and with their exalted Head of dignity and influence, can be maintained. I notice then,

(2.) *Abraham's conduct as a Believer in God.*

Behold a man who signally enjoyed the protection, the presence, the love, the promises of God; with whom an especial covenant had been made; whose child was the miraculous fulfilment of a promise more improbable than had ever been given to a man or woman since God commanded them to multiply upon the earth! Behold, I say, a man thus distinguished, and enriched with this world's good—a man to whom God had engaged Canaan and all the blessings which it shadowed forth to his heart—a man who was to become a great nation, and to possess this land flowing with milk and honey; who yet hath not within its boundary a strip of ground where he may bury his dead out of his sight—no, not so much as to set his foot on! By faith he sojourned in the land of promise in a strange country, willing to wait Jehovah's time and mode of giving him possession; because he looked for a city which hath foundations whose Builder and Maker is God.

Very freely did the children of Heth offer

Abraham a burying place, at his own
 æ, amidst all the sepulchres of the land.
 y would gladly have mingled their dust,
 that of a holy man, whom the Lord mani-
 y favoured. But he who had, through
 's upholding grace, preserved himself and
 ousehold uncontaminated by the idolatries
 he land, would not even mingle his bones
 those of the heathen; lest even thus he
 it appear to sanction their awful apostacy.
 y whose best bond of union while living,
 holy faith in the Lamb of God, and one-
 of spiritual membership in Him, were to
 aid side by side in a sepulchre where their
 es might sleep in Jesus. Their very dust
 t be separated from that of such as lived and
 in rebellion against the one true God—an
 est of the eternal separation between the
 teous and the wicked. In this, as in all
 r things, Abraham was to be a witness
 nt surrounding iniquities. In such a spirit
 Ruth the Moabiteess resolve that she would
 die, and be buried with God's handmaid
 mi. In something of this mind, did the old
 het acknowledge the holiness of that seer
 m yet he had so guiltily seduced. "*When I
 dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein*

in scenes of violence
sations of Satan,
great day of judgment
within the habit
was permitted to
vent cemetery.

The cave of the
family-vault of
Abraham himself
whence he was
buried slept with
of Christ. Her
bodies laid up in
await the resurrection,
say, Jacob was
from whom he
should be brought
of gross idolatry
whom God. who

did Joseph himself command his body, embalmed and coffined in Egypt, to be carried, when Jehovah should visit his people, and bring them forth into the promised land. And upon what principle did these holy patriarchs desire that their dust should rest and be mingled together in the burial-place of Machpelah? Because they embraced the promise of God to give them Canaan—embraced it, not merely in the letter but in the spirit; embraced the sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection from the dead, and the possession of an inheritance in a glorious land, whereof the land of promise was only a feeble type. They had lived to God, a family of grace; they laid them down to die, and they gave directions where to be buried; fully knowing and being abundantly persuaded, that they should rise from the dead, a family of glory. They sought a better country, that is a heavenly: and thus they testified their faith. Upon the same principle did Jeremiah (xxxii. 6, &c.) buy the field of Anathoth from his kinsman, in full persuasion, as God's Spirit taught him, that the inheritance should be regained, and the approaching captivity pass away, after the seventy years appointed for the desolations of Jerusalem.

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graves, only to be thrust into the endless woes and terrors of the second death ; but in virtue of his entire membership with them. Because He arose they shall arise ; because He liveth, they shall live also ; because He reigns, they shall reign also in glory everlasting. We must cry, concerning those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, as we see the finger of decay doing its appointed work upon them, " Bury my dead out of my sight." But when no longer lovely in our view—nay when we can bear to look upon them no longer, they are as dear and as lovely as ever in the sight of Jesus, because He hath redeemed both body and soul to Himself and to God by his blood. He must see in both of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. Ye whose hearts are anchored upon the promises, whose hopes are castled in the covenant of his inviolable truth and love, be persuaded, (and may the persuasion link you more closely still to Him) that neither death nor life shall be able to separate you from that love of God which is in Him. *" If the Spirit of Him that raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead dwell in you, He that raised Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by*

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left for a while, to dwell in the dust,—they whom you have loved and lost having fought the good fight, finished their course, kept the faith, shall be your companions in that royalty, which the Lamb will dispense, and your fellow priests in that high temple, whereof He will be the light and glory. “*He will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.*” “*I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*”¹ O Christians, wheresoever your cave of Machphelah may be, yet when your earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, you shall have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. “*All things are yours, whether of the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.*”² “*Wherefore comfort ye one another with these words.*”

Stand up from before your dead, ye who in

¹ Job xix. 26.

² 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

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Abraham never purchased, nor was he ever permitted to have a foot of land in Canaan beyond this burial place; and yet his posterity according to God's command were to enter, to occupy, to enjoy it. He calls himself a stranger and a sojourner. And the people of God ever so thought themselves, in that very land. Did Abraham then doubt the eventual possession of Canaan? Exactly the reverse. Here, as elsewhere, he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. When he laid the bones of Sarah there, when his own were afterwards deposited by her side, in the same cave of Hebron, he took as it were possession of the country of God's promise, in God's name, and in dependance upon God's truth. In due time the divine engagement was fulfilled, and Israel portioned out the land. Such a spirit of patient faith is required of them who would take possession of the dark regions of paganism in the name of Christ, and there establish a flock, and fold, and Church of the living God. Thus, I doubt not it hath been, and yet must be, in the proceedings of missionary enterprise. What multitudes of ministers have gone forth from our Church, not counting their lives dear

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lives dear unto themselves, that they might cry in the ears of the benighted heathen of Western Africa, “ *Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world,*”¹—had they, I ask, no blessed anticipations, that by thus taking possession of their early and obscure sepulchres in that dreadful cemetery of European life, they had not also gained seizin of these lands for Christ, as Abraham claimed Canaan for God’s heritage, by laying Sarah’s bones, and his own dust in the cave of Mamre? I doubt not that so it hath been; and that time will shew, that in this respect they neither run in vain, nor laboured in vain, nor died in vain. On their tombs will other men like minded stand; from their resting places will other lips proclaim the glad tidings of a Saviour’s love; until the Lord, from amidst these realms of present darkness, adds daily to his Church such as shall be saved. Hasten it, O God, in thy time, and let all who love and believe in Jesus say, Amen.

¹ John i. 29.

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and human circumstances, which, although the unfathomable depths of the divine mind could easily have furnished, the poor and weak creature could never have remembered, in his time of need and temptation, the Most High has laid down some broad and beaming principle, in the revelation of his grace, applicable to every condition wherein men can be placed, and directing them in every duty they have to perform. Had no other beacon been lighted up for guiding us aright in our course of mutual obligations, than that incontestibly divine direction of the Son of God, “ *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.*”¹ it would have amply sufficed for its purpose; because it would have served at once, to point out the unreasonableness of selfish expectation, and the duty which a sense of our own wishes or necessities required us to pay towards the wishes and necessities of others. Still however, the most precious, the most powerful, and indeed the most simple of all these leading principles, wherewith the word of God hath provided us, are those which most immediately connect us with Himself. Such are the faith

¹ Matt. vii. 12.

that realizes and rests upon his word, the love that works through faith, a sense and experience of redeeming mercy, brought home upon our hearts, which presents the Saviour to them as the great and only worthy object of all their affections. These sink the world, and all that it can offer beneath our feet, when it attempts to compete with Him for empire over us; and so constrain us by the love of Jesus, that *"whatsoever we do, whether in word or deed, we should do all to the glory of God."*¹

Under this high and heavenly principle of faith did Abraham act, and found it applicable to all the positions of his varied and eventful life. We have seen how it sustained and comforted him, under his great bereavement by the death of Sarah. We have considered its power over him, with reference to that event, as a *Husband*, and a *Believer*, called to mourn over the removal of one who was most dear, and yet to look through his tears upon the glorious resurrection of the body, and that life everlasting, wherein the ransomed, sanctified, glorified heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ shall *"reckon that the sufferings of this present*

¹ 1 Cor. x. 31.

*time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in them."*¹

We are now to behold the same hallowed principle of faith, and its consequent heavenly mindedness, guiding the patriarch in *an ordinary civil transaction*, in one of those everyday duties, the sum of which composes the business and substance of relative life and its obligations. I allude to the purchase of a sepulchre, wherein the body of Sarah might be laid to await the resurrection of the just, when the flesh that hath rested in hope shall be re-united to the soul, and both shall be for ever with the Lord. Allow me then to exhibit,

I. THE GENERAL DEALING OF ABRAHAM WITH THE HITTITES.

God who often draws to Himself some of his largest revenues of praise and glory from the deepest trials and afflictions of his children, overruled Abraham's cause of sorrow in his heavy loss, not only to the gratification of a most lawful and amiable desire, but also to the honour of his own name, in the patriarch's holy consistency of conduct. And thus, be it remembered, for every believer's consolation, He will

¹ Rem. viii. 18.

act towards those who feel that whatsoever they do, they should do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men.

No doubt one who nearly sixty years before had armed three hundred and ten trained servants, born in his own house, and led them forth to war, had not been unvisited by death. Yet he was hitherto unprovided with a sepulchre, simply because none of the fruit of his body, heirs together with him of Canaan, of a Redeemer, and of an everlasting salvation, had died. But now that the partner of his faith, the fellow heir of his promise, the blessed by of Christ's redeemed and believing Church, removed, her bones must, if possible, rest in that land where the world's Redeemer was to be born and die. Sarah is the first fruits of the family, redeemed from among men to God and to the Lamb, on whom death hath set the seal of an accomplished salvation. Her burial therefore, is not only an act of pious solicitude but of holy faith. Both are in full and gracious exercise, while Abraham is engaged in endeavours to complete a common bargain, of sale and purchase. Observe then,

(1.) *His moderation and lowliness of demeanour.* God hath sworn with an oath to give

him this land,—hath distinguished him beyond any individual, his family beyond any tribe within its borders; and if God were true, nothing could be more certain than his possession of Canaan in full sovereignty, either in his own person, or in that of his posterity. The divine engagement might well have been interpreted in the former sense: and he might therefore have been thought justifiable in claiming as a right, not only what would suffice for a burial place; but enough to form a splendid settlement for himself and his numerous household. A literal interpretation of spiritual promises, made his descendants in after ages confound gracious blessings with carnal views of universal dominion; plunging them into rebellion against their conquerors, and deluging the land with blood. The history of our own country, abounding in the fiercest civil agitations, can testify of a sect of martial enthusiasts, who having assisted to murder the lawful monarch, proclaimed the universal reign of Jesus Christ, together with their own right as the saints of God to the possession of empire under Him. They spurned therefore at all human control, except the iron despotism which themselves would have exercised, and beneath which they would have con-

tinued to oppress and exhaust the groaning land. But Abraham, better taught of God and therefore willing to abide the time appointed in the counsels of eternal wisdom, received the promises, having seen them afar off and embraced them. He stays God's leisure for the possession, four hundred years before he takes livery and seizin; purchasing with money that which the great Owner of heaven gave him free.

He therefore rose up before the sons of Heth, confessing that he was a stranger and pilgrim in Canaan. He is aware of no right to make an inroad upon any man's property: no authority from on high to usurp a civil possession and control. He therefore very meekly intreats from the elders of the land, and the legitimate fountains of power, that they will give, or rather sell him a place where he may bury his dead. He bows down before them and does them reverence, well knowing that the grace could better become a friend of God, than an heir of blessedness, than lowly courtesy to the powers that be, and a submission to the award, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake, if that award violated no command, nor outraged the glory of God.

Abraham's courtesy to the Hittites, who

PURCHASE OF A BURYING-PLACE. 381

judgment in the gate, was strictly a be-
ver's grace, and sprung from a heart wherein
love of God reigned, in the fulness of
ritual power. This present evil world, like
ground which the Lord hath cursed, may
ld something as like to gracious courtesy, as
stern tares to real wheat. But the state of
art which produces the true plant grows not in
soil of nature. It is a fruit of the Spirit,
d is found only in the garden of God. It
ings from charity, and therefore derives its
ng from the life of God within the soul, the
nciple of all grace and goodness. It is no
re form, the phantom of a feeling which has
existence,—the mere outward garb and
nblance of respect and amiableness,—but the
duct of love unfeigned, and without dis-
imulation. It is a disinterested state of inward
ad, and a corresponding exhibition of out-
rd act. Like Abraham's, it seeketh not its
n, but studies the feelings of others; and so
as may be lawful, makes itself all things to
men, if that by any means it may win some,
ing for nothing again. It hath within it
elements of humour and caprice, nothing of
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to have his commerce with a world that lies in the wicked one. Yet he may be conscious at the same time of privileges, blessings, possessions, hopes, reversions, immeasurably more glorious than all that wealth can give, or than all that carnal and worldly men can either desire, or devise for good. And mark

(2.) *The value of holy consistency.* A believer in God, can afford, if I may so speak, to condescend to men of the lowest estate, and bear himself meekly towards the highest. The Hittites were an idolatrous race, the descendants, not of Shem, but of Canaan, to whom no divine, no gracious promises had been made. They were living without God in the world. Yet Abraham had commanded their respect, not merely by his victories, his flocks and herds, and numerous household; but by his holy walk, by manifest tokens of some divine hand accompanying him, by his blameless carriage, his holy zeal, the general consistency between his profession and his practice. This gracious agreement, is palpable even to the eye of sense. A vision utterly dark to spiritual objects can easily discern it; for they who feel not the power of holiness in themselves, can discover the beauty of holiness in others; and

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No command is more frequently or more powerfully urged upon his brethren by the Lord Jesus Christ, than watchfulness. And, after that vigilance which guards his own soul, under the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, against offending God in thought, word, or deed, I know nothing wherein a gracious caution is more needful, to him who walks, as every child of God does walk, in an unbelieving world, than in his duty to maintain a course of holy wisdom towards those who are without. He must be careful that the sacred cause of Christ, and of salvation by Him,—the cause of God's honour, and the influence of his blessed faith, suffer not in the estimation, nor be thrust away from the souls of men by the inconsistency of one who owns his name, and professes to glory only in the Redeemer's cross. There should be an unslumbering anxiety within a Christian's heart upon this great point. Men should be compelled, (and his own conduct is the only compelling force,) to take knowledge of him that he hath been with Jesus. If he be a light shining in a dark place, the darkness may not comprehend it at first, but may at length be led to admire its brightness, to follow it, and to partake it. The believer's life is hid with

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rliest record of a sale and conveyance of land :
 and its simplicity is exceedingly beautiful. A
 more refined state of society has unquestionably
 advantages, very many, and very great. But
 in mechanical principles and their improved
 application to the purposes of motion, some-
 thing is lost in one direction, while there is
 gain in another ; so is it in the more artificial
 and more advanced stages of the social compact.
 Only simplicity and sincerity are more endan-
 gered. Hence springs the multiplication of forms
 and documents. Hence the sad and awful in-
 crease of oaths and adjurations which have been
 introduced into every department of business, to
 such a tremendous demoralization of the hearts
 and consciences of mankind. It has thus at
 length happened, that an oath, the most awful
 form in which man can connect his truth or
 falsehood with the solemnities of eternal judg-
 ment, instead of being for confirmation an end
 of all strife, has become in too many instances
 of the world's intercourse, and not least in its
 commercial relations almost the mockery of a
 name. To return however to the immediate
 subject before us, I observe,

(1.) *The disinterested kindness of Ephron.*

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Christian professors, as the result of that
 mination. Place the conduct of Ephron the
 generous Hittite, in his bountiful offer of
 field and cave of Machpelah, side by side
 with the selfish, forecasting, and huckstering
 policy of Lot, a worshipper of the true God,
 when he chose the plain of Sodom, well watered,
 fruitful as the garden of the Lord, where he
 might feed his flocks, and multiply his pastoral
 wealth. How kind and honourable the bounty
 of the one ; how mean and cold the calculating
 policy of the other ! Ephron offers to Abra-
 ham, (a stranger to his race, whose faith in
 God condemned his unbelief,) the sepulchre
 which he needs, and that with the open hand
 and unsparing liberality. Lot, reckless of his
 neighbour's interest, eagerly grasps the better
 portion for himself. "*What do ye more than
 others ?*" is a question which in matters of
 purity and benevolence, as in all virtues that
 ought to spring from a root of salvation within the
 heart, Christians should frequently put to them-
 selves. Their love of Christ should constrain
 them here, as in every other walk of holy duty.
 Having freely received from the unsearch-

¹ Matt. v. 47.

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his grace of holy disinterestedness, as in
 y other that reflects the Sun of righteous-
 ; if indeed your light be come, and if the
 y of the Lord be risen upon you.

he servant of God must not be excelled by
 servant of the world. “ *Whatsoever things
 true, whatsoever things are honest, whatso-
 things are just, whatsoever things are pure,
 toever things are lovely, whatsoever things
 of good report, if there be any virtue, and
 ere be any praise, we must think on these
 gs.*”¹ Such at least was Abraham’s rule of
 luct, as we learn from

2.) *His disinterested refusal of Ephron’s*
 r.

There are times wherein we may best shew
 sense of a kindness pressed cheerfully upon
 y frankly accepting it. There are other
 s, and other seasons, where our own circum-
 ces, and the honour of God seem to demand
 o decline the liberality, under a sense of the
 gation as deep and grateful, as though we
 actually incurred it. In a former oppor-
 ty Abraham would not receive the goods
 vered in war at the hand of the king of

¹ Phil. iv. 8.

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*saith, he abideth in Him, ought himself so to walk, even as He walked."*¹ But we proceed to shew from this transaction

(3.) *The true spirit of bargain and traffic.*

Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land, and he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, "But, if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field, take it of me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him, My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver;² what is that between me and thee, bury thy dead. And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant. And the field of Ephron which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence

¹ 1 John ii. 6.

² That is, according to some computations, 50*l.* according to others, 60*l.* of our money.

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science tells him is the truth; and if instead of underrating what he verily believes the true worth of the merchandize he desires, the buyer would simply admit it, how much unfairness, how much unkindness, how much suspicion, how many blots upon the fair face of Christian traffic would be removed at once! If the divine rule already quoted were brought to bring its mighty power upon all the interchanges of trade,—“Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them,” it would purify the whole horizon of commercial bargain, from the mightiest to the meanest object of its embrace. If the traffickers of the earth—(and every man who hath a want for himself, or for others, is among the number)—would deal in simplicity of soul; if each would especially remember that God’s honour is in his hands; if each would go to the office, the mart, or the shop, whether as buyer or seller, according to the mind of God; if each would undertake his duty in the spirit of fervent prayer, desirous of acting out the grace it asks of God, commercial reciprocities would soon assume a brighter aspect.

I own, and gladly own that in the vastness of commercial enterprize throughout a land

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the compact. The seller soon fixes his eye upon such buyers, and demands accordingly. The purchaser, so minded, suspects the advance which his own conduct has often fixed upon the article: and what is the consequence? Guilt is thus fastened upon the soul; the conscience is defiled, and made more insensible; and God is systematically dishonoured, in the violation, or the evasion of his command, to say nothing of the spirit, of his Gospel.

‘We greatly mistake,’ as one hath eloquently and truly said, ‘the transforming influence of the gospel, if we do not think that *uprightness* of character emerges at the same time with *godliness* of character; or that the virtues of mercantile intercourse do not form upon the believer into as rich and varied an assemblage, as do the virtues of the sanctuary: or that while he puts on those graces, which are singly acceptable to God, he falls behind in any of those graces which are both acceptable to God, and approved of men. Every professing Christian should vindicate this assertion by his own personal history in the world. He must not put aside his godliness when he has done with the morning devotion of his family; but carry it abroad with him, and make it his companion

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lency; when he repairs to the crowded exchange, and pronounces of every bargain over which truth in all its strictness has not presided, that it is tainted and defiled by sin against God; when he looks into the shop, and in listening to the contest of argument between him who magnifies the object of sale and purchase, and him who would diminish its worth, he calls it the contest of avarice broken loose from integrity.’¹

Of all such doings and dealings—of the defilement of such a spirit, utterly repugant to the glassy simplicity of an evangelical conversation, I would have you ignorant;—or when it comes under your notice, I would have you cry, ‘So will not I, because of the fear of God.’ It is not because it is creditable before all thinking men to eschew the meanness of these prevailing evils; nor is it merely—however deeply worthy of consideration to every disciple of Christ, that a reproach will thus be brought upon all who profess his holy faith, that the unthinking and prejudiced ‘world exaggerates the few into the many, inverting the process of Atonement, by laying the sins of one

¹ Chalmers’ application of Christianity to the commercial and ordinary affairs of life, pp. 61, 62.

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SERMON XXXVII.

ABRAHAM'S PROVISION OF A WIFE FOR ISAAC.

GENESIS XXIV. 2—4.

AND ABRAHAM SAID UNTO HIS ELDEST SERVANT OF HIS HOUSE, THAT RULED OVER ALL THAT HE HAD, PUT, I PRAY THEE, THY HAND UNDER MY THIGH: AND I WILL MAKE THEE SWEAR BY THE LORD, THE GOD OF HEAVEN, AND THE GOD OF THE EARTH, THAT THOU SHALT NOT TAKE A WIFE UNTO MY SON OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE CANAANITES AMONG WHOM I DWELL: BUT THOU SHALT GO INTO MY COUNTRY, AND TO MY KINDRED, AND TAKE A WIFE UNTO MY SON ISAAC.

THE aged believer, as he draws near to the end of his course, looks back upon the past with holy gratitude, and upon the future with a hope full of immortality. Thus happily and graciously minded, he awaits the period of his dismissal, with no abatement of zeal for the divine honour, nor of heavenly love towards those in whom his best earthly affections have been centred. Having himself lived the life of

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be divided into two parts, and viewed accordingly.

I. *Some general remarks upon this holy ordinance of God.*

Already had the sure testimony of Jehovah been given in the patriarch's behalf, (and one of more solemn appeal to every head of a family, could not have been recorded,) "*I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that thing which He hath spoken.*"¹ God will not hide the secrets of his love from that man who will not conceal the ways of salvation from such as are placed under his discipline, authority, and instruction. He shall be magnified of Jehovah, who would exalt Jehovah in his household. Nothing that an ever-watchful care, a zealous and affectionate course of teaching, an unceasingly pleading spirit of prayer, owned, honoured, and blessed from above, could effect to lead Isaac into the path of spiritual peace and life eternal had been withheld. And the end was happy, in proportion as the object and the means were holy.

¹ Gen. xviii. 19.

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Holy Spirit hath transformed into the divine likeness, and whom that Almighty Sanctifier has overruled to seek and secure the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Unquestionably such worldly advantages as may lawfully occur, are not lightly to be overlooked: for they may enable the Christian to glorify God by the employment of more talents in his service, as well as by the thankful enjoyment of more comforts than would otherwise have fallen to his share in the appointments of infinite wisdom. But they who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, will be much on their watchtower of prayer and caution, that such advantages or the desire of them, do not ensnare their minds, and usurp the place of the one thing needful. A simple devotedness to God, under the constraining love of Christ, should be unceasingly and supremely kept in view, by every believer in an estimate of what is essential to be found in the partner of his hopes and joys, his trials and comforts, his desires and efforts to glorify God in his body and in his spirit which are God's.

This sacred union, hallowed especially by its mystical representation of the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church,

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eagerness and anxiety after marriages of wealth or splendour; thus exhibiting too plainly that the world which they profess to have forsaken, has still a fearful hold upon them; and that where much of their treasure is, there is much of their hearts also.

There can be no doubt that Isaac, in whose behalf Abraham's wise and holy design was formed, had full intimation of his father's purpose, was of his council in the whole procedure, as it passed through his mind, and fully consenting to the pious conclusions, at which he had arrived. Between such a father and such a son, there must have been an entire oneness of thought, a harmony of mind, a mutual and unrestricted confidence in all things, and assuredly not least in a matter so weighty as that of Isaac's marriage. And so it should ever be. On the one side, sons or daughters justly offend, if without cause or wilfully, they refuse a parent's choice. They should endeavour to school their hearts into obedience unto those, to whom they owe themselves. On the other hand, a parent shall not be guiltless, if, holding too stern a hand of controul over the fruit of his body, he shall resolve violently to force the child's affections to his own will,—

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at the mercy of the receivers. As to Isaac,—I have already said that his full acquiescence and consent must have been the turning point of this whole gracious and happily-terminated negotiation. It is altogether impossible to imagine, that while the father of the faithful committed such ample powers for conducting it to a servant, he should not have taken sweet counsel with his own son upon a matter so intimately interwoven with that son's happiness, and with the prosperity of the Church of God.

Otherwise than this it ought never to be in Christian marriage. The free and cheerful consent of parents and parties, makes the union both full and happy. Let not the child willingly contradict the wishes of his parents: let not the parent make his own will the tyrant's bed, to which his child must be fitted by whatever torture. And if an unwise choice should still be made, as the infatuated parties, listen rather to the voice of passion than the voice of God, then love and pity, such as the soul of Christ feels for those who are ignorant and out of the way, should so far intercede for the offenders, that though they may suffer for their rashness, it may not be to their utter undoing.¹

¹ Bp. Hall's Works, VIII. 470.

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ore care, but less danger than unwedded life. is more joyous, and more sad. It endures ore burdens; but when undertaken in the me and according to the will of God, it hath pports which celibacy can never claim, (even en Christ himself is equally the portion of e single,) and those very burdens are delight- l.¹ When two walk together, agreed in a acious harmony of love, by being members the same mystical body, united thus to each her, and to their glorious Head in the commu- on of saints, they are better than one. They ar each others burdens, and so fulfil the law . Christ. The toils of the pilgrimage are us alleviated and beguiled. The perils of e conflict, and the hardness to be endured both parties, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, e thus diminished. Each holds over the er, that sword of the Spirit, which is the rd of God, and that shield of faith, whereby e believer is enabled to quench the fiery darts the wicked. Each exercises in the other's half, that fervent grace of an outpoured soul prayer, whereunto, whether personal or rcessory, is linked the peace of God which sseth all understanding. The sources of

¹ Bp. Taylor's Works, Vol. I. p. 706. Edit. 1836.

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When the Apostle tells us, that “ *to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded, is life and peace,*”¹ we have only to examine as it were one side of the picture with minute and exact attention. We have only to learn, what is spiritual mindedness, and what its happy issue in the soul’s life and peace. We may then almost at once conclude what is its dark opposite, *carnal-mindedness*; and what its tremendous consequences in the soul’s eternal death. It is even so in marriage. If it be in the Lord, it is not only the closest and tenderest relation which man or woman can form; but it is amongst the best means of grace, arising out of the providential allotments of God. Nor is there in the all-comprehensive inventory of the Christian’s privileges, one thing connected with “the world,” better calculated to gird up the loins of his mind, that he may run with patience the race that is set before him, looking to Jesus, as the Holy Ghost gives spiritual breath to his soul, and spiritual swiftness to his feet, and spiritual sight to his faith, than the holy state of wedded life. On the other hand, where passion or caprice, where

¹ Rom. viii. 6.

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*hath not been taken ; “ for what communion hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what fellowship hath light with darkness ; and what concord hath Christ with Belial, and what part hath he that believeth with an infidel.”*¹

And where, if these things be so, are the elements of happiness in such ill-assorted unions ? They must be detrimental to personal religion ; which can hardly fail of being chilled and withered in an atmosphere so uncongenial. The quarter whence the greatest good might be expected, will be precisely that whence the greatest mischief will be sped. The very connexion which should have provided the greatest and most congenial help, will furnish forth the most active and unavoidable hindrance. And instead of the love of God pervading, the service of God delighting, and the blessing of God enriching such a family, there will be their dark and dismal opposites. In the brightness wherewith carnal expectancy fills and deludes the eye, all these evils and miseries may be unseen, unexpected, deemed to be impossible. Unbelief may cry, “ To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.” Or if some sus-

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 15.

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become God's ministers to cleanse the land, their hearts should be slack, their arms weak, their swords blunted in that holy war. Or, if the land were to be won by God's converting grace, the means which Abraham's posterity might otherwise provide for effecting such a happy change, must be deplorably weakened, if not destroyed, by the spread of that idolatry, even among the seed of the father of the faithful. Abraham therefore, willingly interchanged civilities with, and exhibited towards the Hittites all the characters of social intercourse; yet will he not allow even the bones of his wife to rest among them. How then shall he permit the son of his body, the distinguished heir of God's promises, the depository of God's pure and holy truth, to become by marriage bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, one body, and too probably one spirit with an idolatress? If Abraham's ear had been open to the calls of worldly policy—if Abraham's heart had not been covered with the breastplate of righteousness—if Abraham's eye had been dazzled with the wealth of Canaan, it would perhaps have been easy, as, upon the world's estimate of good, it would have been wise and politic, to have intermarried Isaac with a daughter from

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basing and defiling intermixtures of idolatry, the knowledge of the true God was yet maintained, as we learn from the chapter before us, as well as from other parts of scripture. Laban and Bethuel owned, when they heard the servants' message, that the thing proceeded from Jehovah; and that consequently they had no independent power either to confirm or contradict it. In after days, when Laban and Jacob had ended their strife, the former invoked Jehovah to watch between them; and called upon the God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the common God of their father, to judge betwixt them. Nahor had forsaken Chaldean idolatry, and with Melcha his wife had settled in Haran, where he worshipped Jehovah, having probably accompanied Abraham and Terah from Ur to Haran, but no further. In the same holy dread of leading a beloved child into idolatry, did it become a grief of mind—a bitterness of spirit unto Isaac and Rebekah, that Esau their first born took for wives two daughters of the Hittites.¹ In the same spirit did Rebekah herself cry unto Isaac. “*I am weary of my life, because of the daugh-*

¹ Gen. xxvi. 34.

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aim of all who name the name of Jesus, as their Saviour, their Portion, and their Joy.

Abraham entrusts this whole affair to his confidential servant, in order to avoid placing in Isaac's way the temptation which might await him in Mesopotamia, whereby he might be induced to remain there, become the citizen of another country, and attach himself to that family, of which a scion should be engrafted on himself. There might be, and indeed certainly was, danger lest it should thus happen; and he who had received the promises, was unwilling that such peril should overtake his son. But why may not Isaac travel himself into Syria? Why may he not settle in the land of Padan-Aram, if he there find a wife, on whom his love may fix itself, and if he may there with her enjoy the happiness, for which his father desires to see him married? May he not carry a better, a more pure, and therefore a more befitting worship of Jehovah thither; and with it all the blessings and mercies of that everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, to him, and to his seed? He may at all events wait there, until his father's death, and then return, to inherit the wealth wherewith God had blessed Abraham, and have that blessing

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Abraham by faith had sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country. Of that country he had not received the promise, but had seen it afar off, and embraced it together with all God's gracious engagements that were linked with it, especially the engagement of transcendent love, that the world's Redeemer should arise from his seed, and that Canaan was but a type of the everlasting rest of God's glorified family. Canaan therefore had become to him more precious than all the world beside. To have turned his own back upon it, or to have willingly allowed that Isaac should leave it, would have been nothing less than a profane permission that this child of promise should despise his spiritual birthright, and make light of that "city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." The Canaanites were not Abraham's countrymen. Canaan, except in Jehovah's promise, and his own gracious adoption of it, was not his own land. But it is the inheritance bestowed upon him by the Lord, and thither must Isaac's wife be brought, there must Isaac live, die, and be buried, as Sarah's bones had been there laid to rest, and

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his riches, the unsearchable riches of Christ. He had sold all that he had, to buy that field; he had gone out into the place which he should afterward receive for an inheritance, (the visible sign for the mightier blessing signified,) not knowing whither he went. He had found Him whom his soul loved; he held Him therefore, and would not let Him go. And what Christ, and Christ's kingdom, seen in the typical mirror of Canaan, were to himself, it was his duty to provide, as far as in him lay, that they should be to Isaac: therefore he would not let him go to marry, and perhaps to abide in Haran.

Would to God that all who profess the faith of Christ crucified were in this, as in other matters like-minded with Abraham, towards their children, in every plan for their important change from single to married life. If they are resolved to know nothing, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified, as their own hope and portion, their wealth, their blessedness; then they can give no better proof of loving their children as their own souls, than by postponing every other consideration to such a connexion for life, as may, through the work of the Holy Ghost, advance their growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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o ourselves, “ *Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He will bring it to pass; in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.*”¹ Difficulties may arise, discouragements may darken around; but to the faithful, a light ariseth in this darkness, and they see beyond it. They believe, they hope, they enjoy, and they glorify God. It is Jehovah’s own promise by the Spirit, “ *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusted in Thee.*”² Heaven and earth may pass away, but that word shall not pass away.

¹ Psalm xxxvii. 5.

² Isa. xxvi. 3.

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relative obligation they may be employed. Thus appealed to, there should be an answer from every heart, whom that Spirit addresses, "*Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth.*"¹

In prosecuting this subject, I propose to exhibit—

THE CHARACTER OF ELIEZER, AS A PATTERN FOR IMITATION BY SERVANTS, AND BY ALL. It is the duty of every ruler, whether called in divine providence to direct the affairs, and influence the prosperity of an empire, or to exercise controul within the more narrow, but dearer limits of a house and a family, to provide that all its members should own the authority of God, and obey his will, under the constraining motive of the love of Christ. And whether his own deep and solemn responsibilities, or the peace and welfare of his house, and its circle of domestic love be considered, the personal character of his servants is of the highest consequence. His household should be a Church of the living God, a pillar and ground of the truth throughout every degree of rank which it may contain; just as the life of God should pervade every member of the Catholic body of Christ's

¹ 1 Sam. iii. 9.

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such high charge he said, "*Can we find such an one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?*"¹ How much more then does such holy caution beseem those, who know that "*Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it*"²—that if the house be divided against itself, and religion set against irreligion within its walls, its peace and spiritual prosperity cannot be maintained. One sinner may thus destroy much good! The consistent dedication of a house to God demands a diligent search after such as may dwell together, in the charity of their common Gospel, keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The duty of servants is neither to be measured by the splendour of the family, nor the gains of the place, but by the order of God, who requires them "*with good will to do service, as to the Lord, and not to men.*"³ They must seek from the Fountain of good that wisdom from above, whereby they may be taught to regard their station, not as a hardship, not as a disgrace, but as the post which God's fatherly love has commanded them to fill, and where the providence of his appointment is linked with the grace of

¹ Gen. xli. 38.

² Psalm cxxvii. 1.

³ Eph. vi. 7.

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whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware that thou bring not my son thither again." He then expresses the full assurance of a triumphant faith, that his covenant God would send an angel to help his embassy, and provide a wife unto Isaac from his own family—but adds, "If the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again." The mind of Eliezer was thus set at ease, because the direction was explicit. He therefore hesitated no longer, but swore to his master concerning that matter; and at once resolved in the strength of Almightyness to do his mission.

In the performance of our duty, especially the most important and confidential, something must be left to the discretion of a servant. But it is a matter of wise and holy prudence, that the direction sought should be as explicit as possible. The probabilities of an exact and conscientious fulfilment of the trust, in dependence on a blessing from God will thus be proportionately increased, while tendencies to pride and self-complacency, are in the same degree diminished.

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charities of holy faith, one with whom he may look forward with the eye of a believer's hope upon the Saviour of the world, and the blessedness of the Church in Him.

In the morning he said, "Send me away unto my master." They would have constrained him to abide a few days—at the least ten; but he was resolute. He said unto them, "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away, that I may go unto my master." Here is an instructive example to us all, whether in the duties wherewith God hath charged us to make our own calling and election sure, or in any other imaginable state and circumstance of life. Here is conscientiousness, clear, transparent conscientiousness, in undertaking the office—against which the voice of selfishness is not permitted a moment's pleading. Instead of allowing a happy issue of the negotiation to compound for a little indulgence, this grace puts wings of fire as it were upon the soul of Eliezer, that he may return and testify of the success wherewith his journey hath been prospered, to the happiness of Abraham, and the glory of God. Whether we rule or serve, whether we be aged or infants in the divine life, whether we be stewards over the family of

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habits, and enjoyments long endeared, to go forth at God's command, not knowing whither he went. And now he is blessed with a servant willing to do the same for him; and that under the high impulse of the same gracious faith. Here, as elsewhere—here, as in every imaginable variety of circumstances and relations, there is a mighty influence in the power of example. The holy or the unbelieving conduct of masters or mistresses terminates not in their own good or evil: it must become a help or a snare to others, not less than a blessing or a curse to themselves.

(2.) Again. *The prayerful spirit of Eliezer is recorded for our instruction.* There is nothing of that atheistical independence of God, nothing of that awful self-confidence, which would thrust the Most High aside from his sovereignty over, and supreme direction of all things, whether the meanest or the mightiest, both in heaven and earth. The devout servant had no sooner accomplished his journey to the city of Nahor, and placed his weary camels in the posture of repose, than we hear him pleading with God, as doubtless he had done throughout the way, "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good

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brought it, as heard and answered in heaven, to its blessed issue. And were the same gracious consent and sympathy universal—were there a meeting of the souls of those who send, and of those who are sent, at the throne of grace—did both parties continue in prayer for each other, and watch in the same, with thanksgiving, the windows of heaven would be opened, and the hand of God would pour down a blessing upon every house, so that there should not be room to receive it. If Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God alone give the increase; how shall the master expect, how shall the servant anticipate good, when neither pray—while a careless command is an insult to the Most High, and a prayerless endeavour to execute it equally revolting to his honour? However ingeniously we may presume ourselves to have adapted the means to the end, there is no connecting link between them for a happy issue, except it be a prayerful dependence upon the wise and gracious sovereignty of our covenant God.

Look into the history! Behold, how greatly prayer is owned, and honoured, and heard and answered of God! “It came to pass, that before he had done speaking, Rebekah came out,” with her pitcher upon her shoulder.

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of God with infallible certainty,—a record not to be consulted by lot, or by superstitious application of any single passage that suddenly meets the eye: but by its own full and blessed general meaning, testifying of the mind of God, applicable to every situation in which we can be placed, and resolving every difficulty whereby we can be harassed. Our heavenly Father indeed, often calls us to regard the leadings of his providence, attending our way, as the eastern star led the wise men to the Epiphany of the incarnate God. But the believer's surest guide is that spiritual sun, which shines in the word of God, like the pillar of fire to the heritage of God in the wilderness. And by that word, should every apparent providential direction be tested, that we may know whether there is safety in following it.

(3.) *The holy thankfulness of Eliezer must not be passed over in silence.*

His prayer had entered with acceptance into the ears of the Lord of Hosts. God indeed, had done for him exceeding abundantly, above all that he could ask or think. Rebekah's ready kindness had realized the secret wishes of his heart, and its silent aspirations of prayer to God. He had found her moreover, to be of

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taught them that song of gratitude and praise, which shall mingle its sweetness with the song of the Lamb, to be sung by the redeemed and sanctified of God for ever. A stronger confidence in God for the future will be produced upon the mind, by a spirit of praise and thankfulness. He is the happy man, who can store up the covenant mercies of God in his memory; feed his faith with thoughts of what hath been already done for him, and thence argue himself into a full and happy persuasion of all future mercies, of which he may stand in need, linked as all are to each other, and to God's everlasting purpose, in the immoveable stability of his gracious covenant. He can thank God and take courage. "*Thou hast delivered my soul from death, wilt Thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the land of the living?*"¹ "*The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.*"²

Again, when Abraham's servant received the consent of Bethuel and Laban to his suit for Rebekah—when they said, "The thing pro-

¹ Psalm lvi. 13.

² 1 Sam. xvii. 37.

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and ground of thankfulness in that eternal redemption which we have in the blood of Jesus. We rejoice and bless God, for ordinary providences successfully overruled, unless we are living without Him in the world. How earnestly then should we bless his holy Name, how loud should be the song, how deep the soul's thankfulness, for those promised and purchased mercies connected with salvation from the wrath to come, in the person, and finished mediation of Jesus Christ! Well may it possess our thoughts, and fill our minds. "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.*"¹

The grace of God is confined to no external situation of life. It gilds and beautifies the lowliest, as brightly as the loftiest stations which can be occupied by the children of God. Gracious conscientiousness, fervent prayer, adoring praise for temporal and spiritual mercies, all freely given, and the latter eternally secured in Christ Jesus, where they meet in those who govern, and in those who serve, are a threefold cord of common blessings that cannot easily be broken. The son of peace dwells in that house, his peace shall rest upon it: and

¹ Psalm ciii. 1.

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she said, I will go." They dismissed her with a blessing : she took that blessing with her from her father's house, and brought it into Isaac's tent. There it abode with her, and made her a treasure of happiness to her husband, and all that he had. The journey homewards was no less prosperous than that of Eliezer into Mesopotamia. Hope had been fulfilled ; faith had now become vision ; prayer had been answered ; and praise had been given.

Isaac was gone forth to meditate in the field at eventide, or as the margin tells us to seek God in prayer—to pour out his soul in that deep silence, in that calm and still repose which needs not language whereby to commune with God. He was realizing God's presence within the depths of the heart, holding happy fellowship there with Him in a quiet enjoyment of his love, and committing himself to his fatherly tenderness with a confidence of dependence that kept him in perfect peace, amidst all causes of anxiety and uncertainty. While thus meditating in the cool of the day, Isaac lifted up his eyes, and saw, and behold, the camels were coming. This was the crisis of his life, the turning point of his happiness or sorrow. It came upon him in the best of all possible attitudes and employ-

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Rebekah were of one mind, lived in peace, and the God of love and peace was with them.

The subject thus considered calls upon me to address a word

I. To Masters, and Heads of Families.

Unto what source shall we trace the holy, prayerful, zealous, self-devoted, conscientious behaviour of Eliezer in this whole matter? We hear not of any especial means of grace, or manifestations of God given to him before he undertook his momentous errand. He had doubtless profited, as God the Holy Spirit enabled him, by the faithfulness of Abraham's instruction, the constancy of Abraham's family sacrifice, and the holy consistency of Abraham's daily walk. And next to the claims of parental love, —inferior only to the calls of kindred upon our affection, are those appeals to our consciences, enlightened, converted, sanctified by the Spirit of God, which the domestics of our families are warranted to make for consistent Christian kindness and zeal in their behalf. They should be treated with the gentleness and condescension of a love, enkindled by the love of Christ Jesus towards ourselves. They should be regarded, not as those who are born to be the vassals of our will, but as those who bear a yoke

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had thus been honoured of God to promote the happiness of his earthly Master, and the good of the Church? Imitate his example in your humble spheres of duty. Employ your single talent for the glory of Him, whose you are, and whom you ought to serve. So shall those among whom you live bless the love of the Lord of all, in sending you to them, and glorify God in you.

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to speak a language which was never contemplated by the mind of the Holy Spirit. The wholesome current of truth and mercy is thus polluted by human admixtures. When readers are more willing to bring a sense to the Scriptures, than to receive one from them, they substitute the broken cisterns of their own unauthorized device, for those wells of salvation, out of which more simple-hearted students draw the water of life with joy and gladness. Their practice serves not to illustrate, but to darken and discredit the mysteries of God. The Church has suffered to a painful extent by the unbridled licence of what is commonly called spiritual interpretation.

We would not venture therefore, after the manner of some expositors, to affirm, that the mission of Abraham's servant to provide a wife for Isaac, is to be decidedly regarded as an allegory of the ministerial office—Eliezer himself being the unequivocal representative of the ambassador of Christ. Nor would we assert, that the marriage of the heir of promise with Rebekah, is absolutely typical of that near and endearing espousal, whereby the Incarnate Word hath betrothed the Church of believers, and every member within its pale of salvation

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I. THE GOSPEL.

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that of marriage; which links the hearts and minds of husband and wife in bonds of such supreme and mysterious tenderness.

(1.) *To effect this counsel of stupendous love, to save sinners, advance our humanity to the highest possible excellence, and glorify his Son, as the Head and Husband of his Church, a ministry of the word is appointed of God. A message of reconciliation, and overtures of spiritual union are committed to a body of men: and upon them rests the solemn responsibility of fulfilling the mind of God in this matter, so far forth as rests with human agency. "Let a man therefore so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."*¹ We have entered into the most solemn vows and obligations to give ourselves wholly unto this office, whereunto it hath pleased God to call us. The oath of Eliezer, exacted from him by Abraham, was not more straitly binding upon his conscience in the sight of God, than is the sacred engagement of his ministers to fulfil their high and awful undertaking towards the parties with whom they have to do,—God the Father who sends them; God the Son,

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 1.

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commission names no person in particular. We are sent upon a comprehensive errand, to seek among you a Bride for the Saviour; to tell our message universally, within the scope and sphere of its extent; to proclaim the love of God, and the glory of Christ, to all without exception. We must draw the bow at a venture; while God, according to his secret and supreme prerogative, directs the arrow of conviction and persuasion between the joints of the harness, pierces the heart, subdues it with love, and overrules its affections, to seek, and be possessed by the Saviour. We go forth therefore, in much outward uncertainty, like Abraham's steward, not knowing who shall believe our report, or unto whom the arm of the Lord shall be revealed. But we trust (and except in this confidence God's messengers can have no comfort) that He who, having commanded Philip the Deacon into the wilderness, brought the Eunuch of Ethiopia to hear at his lips the words of eternal life in the Gospel of Jesus, will lead us, we being in the way of his appointment, to the house of our master's brethren; and by the almighty persuasion of his grace, will enable us to succeed in his cause.

(3.) *Eliezer had no commission beyond that*

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Abraham's faithful servant loved Rebekah for Isaac's sake. He set his heart upon her, that she might be Isaac's wife. For this end he rejoiced over her; for this end he sought her, and obtained her. During a little season, and in an inferior sense, she was united to him; but only as a fellow-traveller, that by him she might be brought unto his distinguished master, in the land of Canaan. All the tender care which a minister takes of those to whom he is sent as a kind of spiritual husband, to provide for them, to lead and guide them, to comfort and sustain them, to instruct and prepare them, is not on his own behalf, but on behalf of that adorable Bridegroom whose he is, and whom he serves. When he has brought a soul to Him, and hears the Bridegroom's voice of welcome in his heart by faith, his joy is fulfilled.¹

Accordingly we never find Eliezer magnifying himself, his authority in Abraham's house, nor dignity in his family: but in deep simplicity, merely affirming himself to be Abraham's servant; exalting his master's greatness and honour, and Isaac's glory as Abraham's universal

¹ President Edwards' Works, viii. 42.

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strength should be made perfect in our weakness; that the excellency of the power should be of God, and not of us; that the earthen vessel should occupy no portion of your regard; or at least should not divide that regard with the treasure which it contains.

(4.) *Prayer is Eliezer's refuge and solace in this important and difficult enterprize.*

Before he opened his commission, he betook himself in supplication to the ever-ready ear of his covenant Jehovah. "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and shew kindness to my master Abraham." And what shall be the hope, and stay, and encouragement of a minister of the Gospel, in his important work? Who is sufficient for the things whereunto he is sent, and for the mighty interests which he is commissioned to advance and secure? The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, has bound upon him the duty of winning souls to Christ. Jesus Himself, the First-born and Head of the whole family of God; Jesus, his sole hope of blessedness, and the Church's sole expectancy; Jesus, in all the power of his claim upon the hearts of men, established by the wonders of atoning love, hath

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touch the ground. The great adversary of men's salvation, and, therefore, of Christ's minister, could never succeed against the vigour and life of pastoral love, zeal, and effort, unless he prevailed to hinder the shepherd's access to God in prayer, and thus robbed him of the power of saying, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.*"¹ A prayerless minister, as he can never truly desire, so he can never reasonably hope to win souls to God, and bring the bride, in search of whom he is sent, to Christ.

(5.) *There is a devotedness in the conduct of Eliezer, well befitting the ambassadors of the Saviour, in their all-important charge.* He would not eat, he would not drink, until he had delivered his message. And when it was happily accomplished, he refused to rest in the house of Bethuel, beyond the night which was absolutely necessary for repose after past fatigue, and preparation for the journey yet before him. Herein he hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps. The watchman of souls, the commissioned servant of our Almighty Father, must not hope that his heart is right, that he hath a conscience void of offence, that

¹ Phil. iv. 13.

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had done all that in him lay, according to his bounden duty, to bring all such as should be committed to his charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left, either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life.¹ “*It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.*”² Diligence in duty is an especial part of that fidelity. “*Necessity is laid upon us, yea woe unto us if we preach not the Gospel.*”³ Woe unto us, if the toys and trifles of worldly allurements turn our thoughts from this great work; or, if carnal pursuits, pleasures, studies, occupy our minds and our moments, while the glory of the Saviour committed to our trust, and the everlasting interest of men’s souls, to be made good only as they are brought in faith to the Lamb of God, are overlooked and neglected.

(6.) *Abraham’s steward took jewels and gifts of his master’s goods, and put them upon Rebekah; and gave of them to her kindred, and spake of all the glory of his master’s son.* He so prevailed, that the damsel was given into his hand; and her own heart yearned to

¹ Form and Manner of Ordaining of Priests.

² 1 Cor. iv. 2.

³ Ibid. ix. 16.

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We can exhibit indeed only, as I said, a minute fraction of our Redeemer's wealth, and

¹ Coloss. i. 19.

² Gen. xlv. 9.

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had been dear in the land of her birth, the servant was to be freed from his oath. Isaac was not to leave Canaan; and a wife must be sought for him elsewhere. Even thus it must be with the spiritual Bride of Jesus Christ. He will give you no authority to hope, nor us permission to declare, that He will come and join you in marriage with Himself, and dwell with you in the land of nature and of sin. You cannot be engrafted upon Him, without being separated, and that for ever, from your original stock. You must be dead to the law, that you may be married to another, even to Christ; and so bring forth fruit unto God. For this cause, shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh. The mystery of which the Apostle speaks, is the gracious and mystical union between Christ and his Church. "*Hearken, O daughter, and consider; incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty, for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him.*"¹

Abraham did not more peremptorily forsake

¹ Psalm xlv. 2.

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*"Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee."*¹ If you will not accompany us to the waiting Bridegroom, and to the land of promise, we shall be free from the vow wherewith our consciences are bound, and we can only mourn over your delusion.

Advise then, and see what answer we shall return to Him who sent us. Will you receive our message; will you credit our embassy; will you allow us to conduct you into the glorious presence of the Bridegroom; to the consummate joys of your marriage with the Lamb of God? Will you permit us to espouse you in the name, and present you to the love of Christ? He will not be satisfied with a divided heart. *"You must lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset you; and look unto Jesus,"*² as repaying the sacrifice a thousand fold. You can have no higher interest; for you will be complete in Him. You can have no greater happiness; for bridegroom never rejoiced over bride, as the Lord your God will rejoice over you. You can have no duty more pressing; for *"ye are not your own*

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 25.

² Heb. xii. 2.

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through my comeliness, which I put upon thee, saith the Lord God." "The Saviour is made of God unto every one that believeth, *wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.*"¹ Will you then go with us, and dwell with Him? Hear his gracious assurance,—"*All that I have is thine.*"² Christ descended from his Father's bosom, and contracted his divinity with flesh and blood, and married your nature, that you might become his Bride, to be cleansed with his blood, to have his Holy Spirit for a dowry, and his kingdom of eternal happiness for a jointure. "*All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's:*"³ "*And eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.*"⁴

Nothing is said of Rebekah's portion. She had little probably beside herself; and Isaac sought no more. And to every individual, whose love, by us, the Great Bridegroom of the Church condescends to ask, doth He cry, as

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30.

² Luke xv. 31.

³ 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

⁴ 1 Cor. ii. 9.

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that becomes the new believer, when brought near to Christ, and first admitted, as it were, to personal fellowship with Him, as the Lord and Disposer of body and spirit to his own use and service. “ *I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee ; therefore I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes.*”¹ It must have been a most welcome consummation to Eliezer, when he saw Rebekah alight from her camel and do this reverence to Isaac, as a pledge of her future obedience and submission. And glad and grateful should it make the heart of a steward of God, when the Bride, whom he hath brought to Christ, feels deep self-abasement, in a view of his surpassing glory ; compares his condescending love with her own unworthiness ; and cries “ *Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him ?*”² “ *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit ; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*”³ “ *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.*”⁴

(4.) *We cannot doubt that Isaac's heart had*

¹ Job xlii. 5.

² Psalm li. 17.

³ Psalm viii. 4.

⁴ Matt. v. 3.

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you within the arms of an everlasting affection. Should not a persuasion so endearing, quicken your zeal, animate your love, prompt your decision, and put wings upon your desire to be joined to the Lord in one spirit, and to be his for ever?

(5.) *Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother's tent, and took her, and she became his wife, and he loved her. He was comforted after his mother's death, and she was the solace of his life.*¹ If the parallel hath been hitherto complete, it will not fail at last. The happiness of communion between Isaac and Rebekah is,—compared to that which springs from the holy fellowship between the Saviour and those who walk with Him in the light and bliss of salvation,—as the earliest gleam of twilight, to the brightness of the noontide sun. As the bridegroom, O believer, rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. When Adam spake of Eve there was much meaning in the mode of his expression—"The woman whom Thou gavest to be *with me*," and not merely whom Thou gavest *unto me*. She was not only a possession, but a companion. Such is the rela-

¹ Gen. xxiv. 67.

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altogether lovely. Surely every throb of your hearts should be in unison with his own declaration, "*Thou shalt not be for another man, so will I also be for thee.*"¹

And now, "*If ye will deal kindly and truly with my Master, tell me; and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.*" Will ye betroth yourselves to the Son of God, on whose behalf I come; or must I await, in God's good time, others, who will hear the message, and allow me to bring them unto the Saviour's home and heart, to be numbered among his saints for glory everlasting? The servant told Isaac all things that he had done; but he brought Rebekah, as the best evidence of success in his mission. O thou Eternal God, on whose errand of life we come to this family, beseeching them in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to Thee, and united to Him, grant us the same happy results in bringing them effectually to Thee; that when we shall appear in the presence of Christ, many who are now our hope may be our crown of rejoicing!

¹ Hosea iii. 3. Gen. xxiv. 49.

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intercourse; and I trust that in the course of my fellowship with it, some better acquaintance with the mind of God has been vouchsafed to me. More spiritual improvement would assuredly have been derived to my own heart, in a deeper knowledge of divine dealing, a greater sense of divine love, and a better appreciation of faith, as the shield of the believer's left hand, while his right holds the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, if the matter had been more powerfully, because more prayerfully applied to my own conscience. How it has fared in this all-important regard with you, can be known only to Him, whose prerogative it is to search the heart, and to yourselves. 'If however,' (to apply the language of Bishop Horne, concerning a work of far different pretensions,) 'I could flatter myself that any one had taken half the pleasure in hearing the life of Abraham, that I have taken in writing it, I should not fear the loss of my labour. The hours passed in these meditations, passed very pleasantly; they are gone, but have left a relish and a fragrance upon the mind, and the remembrance of them is sweet.' The subject will reach its close at the end of the present discourse. I commend it, under a deep sense of

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salvation, had now been dead seven years. The patriarch himself was more than a hundred and forty years old. All the emotions of worldly love might well be imagined to have been buried in the grave of Sarah; and his hourly thoughts to have been fixed upon the invisible realities and glories of that state where they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Upon what principle then may we account for this act of Abraham's life? Must we diminish our deep and fitting veneration for the friend of God, in these later moments of his pilgrimage, when the eye of his faith, and the aspirations of his heart, should be especially directed towards "*the city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.*"

It has frequently been supposed that Moses, here, as in some other places,¹ has related this transaction out of the proper order of time: and that Keturah, who is referred to in the sixth verse, not as his wife, but as his concubine, must have been united to him during the life time of Sarah. It is asserted, that he who rested upon divine promise that he should

¹ The death of Ishmael is recorded in ver. 17, yet he lived until Jacob and Esau were sixty-three years old; and Abraham himself lived until they were fifteen years of age.

is also said, that the marriage between him and her would have been the same as if Abraham had married Isaac, if he had been who had been before. It is said that he took Keturah ten years after his marriage with her before she gave birth to a pair of boys, in despair of being able to produce the promised seed. He should have married a number of his wives in connexion.

But is it not a supposition? Is it the recorded fact that Sarah? He

Sarah's jealousy against Keturah, which could hardly have failed to be excited in such a case; and to have been given as a reason why she should wish to have a son from her own hand-maiden, Hagar. The conduct of Abraham towards his wife, is marked by an affectionate tenderness, which bears with her barrenness in absolute silence; because it is the tenderness of faith, resting upon and realizing the fulfilment of a promise from the God of truth,—a tenderness, with which his supposed early relation to Keturah, would appear in no small degree inconsistent. Still less probable does it seem, that he would grieve the heart of his wife by such a measure, after the birth of Ishmael, concerning whom he cried, "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" and especially after the birth of Isaac; when he saw the sorrow and anger which she had felt in consequence of the persecution endured by her son.

We may therefore well believe, that Abraham, having mourned for his wife three years, and seen Isaac united to Rebekah, took to wife Keturah, who was probably the principal of his female servants, as Eliezer of Damascus was his steward. The same Almightyness of God, which by miracle gave him Isaac at a hundred

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posterity which God had promised him,¹ he took to wife Keturah; and was permitted to behold the divine engagement in ample process of fulfilment? Such a judgment is at least that of charity, and assuredly not that of improbability, when the whole of God's wondrous dealing with Abraham is taken into the account. It arises from the most simple view of the sacred historian's narrative; and in our expositions of Scripture, where a literal construction or meaning will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst.²

Keturah, it is true, both in this chapter, and 1 Chron. i. 32, 33, is called the concubine of Abraham, but not in the same sense as Hagar. She was not indeed married with the same ceremonial and solemnity as Sarah, nor could her children be admitted as heirs with Isaac. But she was still the patriarch's lawful wife. She was no bondwoman, like Hagar to Sarah; but had the rule over his house, and filled the place of Sarah when she slept in the grave of Mamre. The knowledge and fear of the one true Jehovah, was in some degree preserved among their descendants. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses

¹ Gen. xviii. 5, 6.

² Hooker, Book V. Sect. 59.

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that thus it should be; and any other appropriation of his wealth after that engagement would have been a breach of faith, which the friend of God would never have committed. In fact, it rested not with Abraham to divide what his Almighty Benefactor had given him: the sentence of God Himself, having, as I said, already made the appropriation, in a manner the most solemn and irrevocable.

(2.) But, as the Saviour cried to Nathanael, "*Because I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these;*"¹ so, notwithstanding we are led to consider Isaac as one much distinguished by his ample inheritance of earthly good, *our view of his happiness will be vastly extended, our sense of his privileges prodigiously enlarged, as we contemplate that glorious and gracious horizon of spiritual blessing, which the only worthy interpretation of God's word draws aside the veil to exhibit.* The promise can only have its accomplishment in a bestowment of mercies, secured to Isaac by that everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, which had been made in the absolute freeness of divine love

¹ John i. 50.

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(3.) And in this rich inheritance, what is Isaac himself, but a *representative, accommodated by divine condescension to our apprehension, of Him whom the Father hath appointed Heir of all things.*¹ To that Son the Everlasting Father hath given "*the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.*"² To that Son He hath given all power in heaven and earth. That son He hath loved, and put all things into his hand. To that son He "*hath given a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

(4.) But what advantage, it may be asked, do the spiritual kindred of Isaac derive from this mysterious, but assuredly real spiritual connexion between him and the Saviour of all? The key to unlock this door of blessed hope is in the hand of faith. The eye to view these treasure-chambers of mercy, is the eye of faith. The power of appropriating their stores of spiritual and gracious wealth, is the power of faith. The

¹ Heb. i. 2.

² Ps. ii. 8.

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complacency in perfect rest. If the eye of man were searching as the sun, from the light of which nothing is hid, yet amidst all the innumerable objects which it might behold, there is not one that can fill and satisfy the ever-craving soul of man. Only the spiritual mercies of the covenant, the exceeding great and precious promises, which in Christ Jesus are yea and amen to the glory and praise of God, having Himself for their exhaustless substance, can fill the believer with all the fulness of God. But with that fulness, the Christian's expectancy, however amply faith may enlarge it, shall overflow. The spring comes forth from the sanctuary; it swells out from the altar of the Redeemer's sacrifice. And when poured by the Holy Ghost through faith into the soul, will roll onwards, enlarging and deepening, refreshing and consoling, sanctifying and strengthening, fertilizing and purifying the believer, not only through the time-state of the world of grace, but through the state eternal of the world of glory.

(5.) *To Ishmael and the other sons of his concubine, Abraham gave gifts; but he sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, into the east country.* The Most

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of providential and perishable gifts. And whereunto shall our allotment of present bounties and possessions tend, if it be not accompanied and sanctified by an interest in the covenant of salvation? We shall but possess the shadow, instead of the reality of good. We may fix our hearts upon it, as though it were substantial. But if the things of this life, however desirable and desired, are our only portion—if we have none for the soul's present resting place, as well as for eternity, in the Person and salvation of the Son of God, mind has no power to imagine, language has no faculty to describe the misery and destitution of our state. Thus bereft of all by the hand of death, and cut off from the Christian's cause of joy unspeakable and full of glory by unbelief, we shall each cry with Micah when the Danites robbed him of his idols, "*Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and what have I more?*"¹ But I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak.

The course of this history now carries us to consider, finally,

¹ Judges xviii. 24.

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(Gen. xv. 15.) "*Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.*" Of all, whose passage from mortality to immortality is mentioned in Scripture, this promise is given only to Gideon, (Judges viii. 32.) and David, (1 Chron. xxix. 38.) Man's age is comparative; and life's true length,—its duration, with reference to its everlasting end, is not measured by lapse of years, but by growth in grace, and in meetness for the inheritance of the saints of light. An aged disciple of Christ Jesus may answer the cry, "*Surely I come quickly,*" by saying, "*Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;*" and drop before the sickle, like a shock of corn, ripe in its season. Another happy member of his body mystical may be summoned in the may-time and morning of youth, before he hath borne the burden and heat of the day, or learned how sweetly and how mightily the comforts of God refresh the soul in its spiritual work and conflict. What then? Shall we say that he has become the tenant of an untimely grave? Shall we not rather hear the attestation which even his young experience will make to the fidelity of God? "*I have fought a good*

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be with Him, in that glory which He hath enjoyed as the Uncreated Word of the Father, whom yet he knew as the Messiah, in whom himself and all the nations of the earth should have their blessing. That believer hath attained to a happy and distinguished standing in the school of his Redeemer's grace: who hath power to welcome Him in a dying hour; who thinks that he has lived long enough, when Jesus so thinks; and who springs forward to Him with the cheerful cry, "*Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*"¹ Alas! how many loathe life, and yet are insatiable for its continuance! Would you escape this tremendous bondage? Let it be Christ to you to live, and then it will be gain to die; and of that gain you will probably have a foretaste, in the last conflict with the last enemy.

(3.) *We have no proof that Abraham died without pain.* We know not, more than in the case of Sarah, whether his last moments were gladdened by any especial outpouring of joy upon his soul, in sensible communion with God; whether he possessed simply the calmness of hope, or the triumph of a full assurance of

¹ Rev. xxii. 20.

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*in faith, not having received the promises ; but having seen them afar off, and been persuaded of them, and embraced them.*¹ That mighty grace, placing the everlasting arms of divine fidelity and love beneath him, upheld him during a century of wanderings and waitings, of hope deferred, and of opposition from without. But "*he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.*"² He was faithful unto death ; and God all-sufficient, before whom he walked in perfectness, gave him a crown of life. If this illustrious man embraced the promises beheld so darkly and so distantly, amidst the clouds and shadows of the patriarchal economy, what ought to be the amount, and what the fervour of Christian faith, under the new Testament of the grace of God ! If, with their imperfect revelation, the early saints endured the trials, and overcame the temptations of the world, how stable should be the believer's walk, how strong his hands to war, and his fingers to fight the spiritual battle, when the Head and Captain of his salvation hath now been exhibited triumphing in his behalf ! But what is the fact ? Shall we say that the Christian's

¹ Psalm xxxi. 5.² Heb. xl. 27.

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laying Sarah's bones within its borders. He will now again take seisin of the country, by depositing his own bones to moulder there, and by bequeathing his dust to mingle with the dust of the promised land ; as well as with that of his beloved wife, " in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal hope, through our Lord Jesus Christ ; *who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.*"¹ That Abraham had a hope full of immortality, we cannot doubt. Had it never before been enkindled in his bosom, it must have poured its light and glory upon his heart, in that wondrous transaction upon Mount Moriah, when he offered up Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead ; and in the same moment saw the day of the Son of Man. In fact, the great mystery of redemption from sin through the Atonement, involves, by an absolute necessity, the knowledge and persuasion of a future everlasting state ; and is wholly unintelligible upon any other supposition. When we read therefore, that Abraham *was gathered to his*

¹ Phil. iii. 21.

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In that state rest the spirits of all who have departed in the true faith and fear of God's holy name. In that state may we be found, if we fall asleep before the coming of our Lord! And in that great day of his appearing, may our souls and bodies, glorified and sinless, be united to partake the wonders of the resurrection of the just, to live with God, all and in all for ever!

But death will gather us *to our people*. If our companions have been they who loved and trusted in the Saviour—if our communion hath been with the saints—if our fellowship hath been with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, in the light and liberty of holiness, then shall we be ever with them and with the Lord. If our conversation hath been with the sinner, the unbeliever, the God of this world—such companionship forming the dark tenor of our lives, and the dismal character of their end, so will be the society of the world everlasting. “Judge therefore yourselves, dear brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord.”

IV. I may add—and the subject would be incomplete without such a remark, that A BELIEVER IN GOD MAY EXPECT HIS OWN COVENANT REDEEMER AND FATHER TO BE

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to God."¹ He also dwelt as a stranger and a pilgrim in Canaan; and had his conversation in heaven.

The prayer of parental faith hath a mightiness of prevalency with God, to open his heart towards the children of his pleading family; as he first closed and then opened the windows of heaven to the supplications of Elijah. The example of parental holiness, brings with it a blessing upon children, both for this world and for that which is to come. Joseph said to his brethren and children, "*I die, and God will surely visit you.*"² Such language may the departing believer adopt concerning those for whom he hath wrestled with God, and use it in the full assurance of faith. Christian parents, use it now; and trust a faithful God for its issue!

And here, to use the exquisite language of Isaac Walton, in his record of our own Hooker's death,—here I draw Abraham's curtain; tiff with the most glorious company of the Patriarchs and Apostles, the most noble army of Martyrs and Confessors, this most humble holy man shall also awake to receive an eternal tranquil-

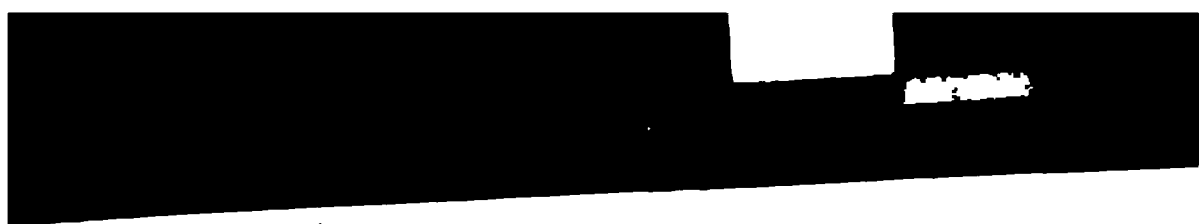
¹ Rom. iv. 20.

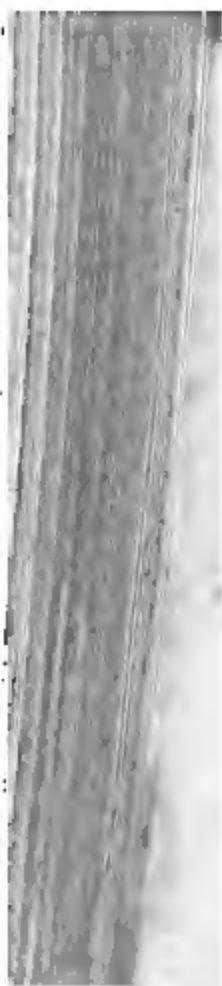
² Gen. i. 24.

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